



The Kurdish nationalist movement (in-)between Turkey and Europe.

Transnational political activism and transformation
of home through the EU.

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Dissertation presented in fulfillment of the requirements for Ph.D. degree in Political and Social Sciences. Option Political Sciences.

Ghent University

Academic year 2010-2011

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MIDDLE EAST & NORTH AFRICA

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RESEARCH GROUP

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Acknowledgements

Writing a PhD is often considered a very lonely and solitary business. I tend not to agree with that. Even though it has indeed been up to me get things organized, setting my own deadlines and sticking to personal goals, and even though I have, just like any other PhD student experienced moments of great doubt and sometimes anxiety, feeling unable of getting a hold on the realities ‘out there’, still, looking back on these past years, what stands out is all the support I have enjoyed along this journey. That is why I would like to acknowledge everyone who accompanied me.

First of all my, gratitude goes to Pascal, without whom I never would have dared to enter university, let alone start with a PhD. Pas, it is because you have never ceased to believe in me and always challenged me to do the things I did not think myself capable of that I am standing where I am standing today. You were with me all along this road, and I know that it has been a very hard and at times a very painful one, but I cannot tell you how happy I am we made it through this together. Thank you so much my love.

Secondly, I want to thank Sami Zemni for his great trust, support, patience and encouragement during the years he has been my ‘boss’ and also a great colleague and friend. Sami, you gave me the freedom to explore my subject and to pursue the issues that I found important. You did not impose your own interests on me, and that is something many students can only dream off. You were confident that I would get things done and this comforted me at many points where I felt lost along this road. I truly hope that I will also be able to similarly entrust anyone who may work under my supervision in later life.

Thirdly, I want to thank Joost Jongerden, for his insightful thoughts and questions, his never-ceasing enthusiasm, his curiosity and his determination that made him a ‘craft brother’ over the past four years. Joost, thank you so much for having joined me on this road. Maybe you were not on my initial ‘roadmap’, as in retrospect you should have been my co-promotor, but surely you made this road so much less bumpy and all the more exciting. I have learned so much through co-writing and publishing with you and through the hundreds of mails we have sent back and forth over the last years. Thank you so much for sharing, daring and encouraging.

Fourth, I want to express my gratitude to Ahmet Akkaya, and my other friends from Turkey: Gaye, Mete, Ezgi, Fatih, İrem, Berivan and Çiğdem for their warm friendships and enormous hospitality. I truly have been lucky getting to know you all. I feel like I have learned so much from you, including, and maybe most importantly, the deep sense of humanity and solidarity and perseverance to defend those things you believe in. You have allowed me to grasp much better the complexity and the beauty of Turkey, the Kurdish regions and the people living in these contested places.

Fifth, I want to thank all my colleagues at the Department of Third World Studies. In particular, my appreciation goes to Christopher Parker, Bert Suykens, Koenraad Bogaert, Sigrid Vertommen, Omar Jabary-Salamanca, Annemie Vermaelen and Karen Büscher. I have loved working with you and you all made this place a second home. Thank you for having been there during the good days and the bad days. I do hope this is no farewell yet.

I am also grateful to have enjoyed a four-year scholarship for this PhD from the Research Foundation – Flanders (FWO), which not only provided me with an income but also with the means to go into the field and conduct fieldwork, as well as attend (overseas) conferences.

I am also indebted to Andy Hilton, who has done a great job editing most of my writings. Andy, you managed to struggle through my Dutchified English and time and again got my way too long sentences straight. Besides that, I have very much appreciated your queries, suggestions and insightful comments. The same is true for Nicole Watts, who has challenged and inspired me. Thanks Nicole.

Finally, I owe so much to my loving family and friends. Papa and Mama, Papa Patrick and Mama Annie, Bompa and Bomma, thanks for having supported me all those years, probably often wondering what it exactly was that I was doing. Mieke, Els, Karlien, Annemie, Elke D, Soetkin, Phille, Mich, Stijn, Ben, Elke H and Nancy, thanks for being there for me and for Pascal during the past years. I don't know where I would have been without the support of all of you guys (and girls)! I love you all.

Abbreviations and Foreign Names

- ADYÖD – Association for Higher Education in Ankara (*Ankara Demokratik Yüksek Öğretim Derneği*)
- AKP – Justice and Development Party (*AK Partisi, Adalet ve Kalkınma Partisi*)
- AKSA – Organization of Kurdish Student Movements
- Ala Rizgarî* – Flag of Liberation
- ALDE – Alliance of Liberals and Democrats for Europe
- ANAP – Motherland Party (*Anavatan Partisi*)
- ARGK – Kurdistan People's Liberation Army (*Arteşa Rizgarîya Gele Kurdistan*)
- ASALA – Armenian Secret Army for the Liberation of Armenia
- CHP – Republican People's Party (*Cumhuriyet Halk Partisi*)
- CIA – Central Intelligence Agency
- CPT – Committee for the Prevention of Torture
- DDKD - Revolutionary Cultural Associations of the East (*Devrimci Doğu Kültür Derneği*)
- DDKO – Revolutionary Cultural Hearths of the East (*Devrimci Doğu Kültür Ocakları*)
- DEHAP – Democratic People's Party (*Demokratik Halk Partisi*)
- DEP – Democracy Party (*Demokrasi Partisi*)
- Dev Sol* – Revolutionary Left (*Devrimci Sol*)
- Dev-Genç* – Revolutionary Youth (*Devrimci Gençlik*)
- Dev-Yol* – Revolutionary Path (*Devrimci Yol*)
- DHKD – Revolutionary People's Cultural Association (*Devrimci Halk Kültür Derneği*)
- DHKP – Revolutionary People's Liberation Party (*Devrimci Halk Kurtuluş Partisi*)
- DHKP/C - Revolutionary People's Liberation Party/Front (*Devrimci Halk Kurtuluş Partisi/Cephesi*)
- DİSK – Confederation of Progressive Trade Unions of Turkey (*Türkiye Devrimci İşçi Sendikaları Konfederasyonu*)
- DİSP – Revolutionary Socialist Workers' Party (*Devrimci Sosyalist İşçi Partisi*)
- DTH – Democratic Society Movement (*Demokratik Toplum Hareketi*)
- DTP – Democratic Society Party (*Demokratik Toplum Partisi*)
- EC – European Commission
- ECHR – European Court of Human Rights
- EMEP – Labor Party (*Emek Partisi*)
- EP – European Parliament
- ERNK – Kurdistan National Liberation Front (*Enîya Rizgarîya Netewayî Kurdistan*)
- EU – European Union
- EEC – European Economic Community
- EFA –European Free Alliance
- EHP – Labor Movement Party (*Emekçi Hareket Partisi*)

Eğitim-Sen – Education and Science Worker's Union (*Eğitim ve Bilim Emekçileri Sendikası*)
ESF – European Social Forum
ETA – Basque Country and Freedom (*Euskadi Ta Askatasuna*)
EUTCC – EU Turkey Civic Commission
EZLN – Zapatista Army of National Liberation (*Ejército Zapatista de Liberación Nacional*)
Fazilet Partisi – Virtue Party
FHDD – Palestinian People Solidarity Association (*Filistin Halkıyla Dayanışma Derneği*)
FHKC – Palestinian Popular Front for Liberation (*Filistin Halk Kurtuluş Cephesi*)
FKBDC – Unified Resistance Front Against Fascism (*Faşizme Karşı Birleşik Direniş Cephesi*)
GAP – Southeast Anatolia Project (*Güneydoğu Anadolu Projesi*)
Genel-İş Sendikası – General Workers' Union
GJM – Global Justice Movement
GONGO – Governmental Non-Governmental Organization
Greens/EFA – Green/European Free Alliance
GUE/NGL – *Gauche Unitaire Européen*/Nordic Green Left
HADEP- People's Democracy Party (*Halkın Demokrasi Partisi*)
HAK-PAR – Rights and Freedoms Party (*Hak ve Özgürlükler Partisi*)
HEP- People's Labor Party (*Halkın Emek Partisi*)
HPG – People's Defense Forces (*Hêzên Parastina Gel*)
IRA – Irish Republican Army
KADEK – Kurdistan Freedom and Democracy Congress (*Kongreya Azadî û Demokrasiya Kurdistanê*)
KCDK – Coordination of Democratic Communities in Kurdistan
KCK – Association of Communities in Kurdistan (*Koma Civakên Kurdistan*)
KDP – Kurdistan Democratic Party (*Partiya Demokrat Kurdistan*)
KESK – Confederation of Public Workers' Unions (*Kamu Emekçileri Sendikaları Konfederasyonu*)
KHRP – Kurdish Human Rights Project
KIB – Kurdish Institute of Brussels
KKDK – Progressive Democratic Labour Organization Kurdistan (*Komelên Karkerên Demokratên Kurdistan*)
KKK – Association of Associations in Kurdistan (*Koma Komalan Kurdistan*)
KNK – National Congress of Kurdistan (*Kongra Netewiya Kurdistan*)
KOÇ-KAK – Kurdistan Workers and Culture Association (*Komela çanda Karkêren Kurdistan*)
KOMKAR – Federation of Kurdish Labour Organizations (*Komela Karkerên Kurdistanê*)
Kongra-Gel – People's Congress (*Kongra Gelê Kurdistan*)
KRG – Kurdistan Regional Government

KSSE – Kurdistan Student's Society in Europe (*Komeley Xwendikarani Kurdistan li Ewropa*)
KUK – National Liberators of Kurdistan (*Kurdistan Ulusal Kurtuluşçular*)
KXPK – Progressive Kurdish Student Association
MSF – Mesopotamia Social Forum (*Mesopotamya Sosyal Forumu*)
PDS – Party for Democratic Socialism (*Partei des Demokratischen Sozialismus*)
PLO – Palestinian Liberation Organization
Mala Gelê Kurd - Kurdish People's House
MEP – Member of European Parliament
MGK – National Security Council (*Milli Güvenlik Konseyi*)
MHP – Nationalist Action Party (*Milliyetçi Hareket Partisi*)
MIT – National Intelligence Organization (*Milli İstihbarat Teşkilatı*)
NATO – North Atlantic Treaty Organization
NGO – Non Governmental Organization
NUKSE – National Union of Kurdish Students in Europe
NGL – Nordic Green Left
ÖDP – Freedom and Solidarity Party (*Özgürlük ve Dayanışma Partisi*)
OHAL – State of Exception (*Olağanüstü Hal*)
PJAK – Free Life of Kurdistan Party (*Partiya Jiyana Azad a Kurdistan*)
PKK – Kurdistan Workers Party (*Partiya Karkêren Kurdistan*)
PSE – Party of European Socialists (*Le Parti socialiste européen*)
PSK – Kurdistan Socialist Party (*Partiya Sosyalîsta Kurdistan*)
PUK – Patriotic Union of Kurdistan (*Yekîti Nîstimanî Kurdistan*)
PWD – Patriotic Democratic Party (*Partiya Welatperez Demokratik*)
RAF – Red Army Fraction (*Rote Armee Fraktion*)
Rizgarî – Liberation
Rîya Azadî – Freedom Path
RP – Welfare Party (*Refah Partisi*)
Serxwêbun – Independence
SDP – Social Democracy Party (*Sosyal Demokrasi Partisi*)
SHP – Social Democratic People's Party (*Sosyaldemokrat Halk Partisi*)
TBMM – Grand National Assembly of Turkey (*Türkiye Büyük Millet Meclisi*)
TEKOŞER –Kurdish Workers and Student' association of Belgium
THKO – People's Liberation Army of Turkey (*Türkiye Halk Kurtuluş Ordusu*)
THKP/C – People's Liberation Party-Front of Turkey (*Türkiye Halk Kurtuluş Partisi-Cephesi*)
TİKKO – Workers and Peasants' Liberation Army of Turkey (*Türkiye İşçi Köylü Kurtuluş Ordusu*)
TİP – Workers Party of Turkey (*Türkiye İşçi Partisi*)
TSIP - Socialist Workers' Party of Turkey (*Türkiye Sosyalist İşçi Partisi*)
TKDP - Turkey Kurdistan Democratic Party (*Türkiye Kurdistan Demokratik Partî*)

TKP – Turkey Communist Party (*Türkiye Komünist Partisi*)
TMMOB – Union of Chambers of Turkish Engineers and Architects (*Türk Mühendis ve Mimar Odaları Birliği*)
TOBB – Union of Chambers and Commodity Exchanges of Turkey (*Türkiye Odalar ve Borsalar Birliği*)
TRT – Turkish Radio and Television (*Türkiye Radyo Televizyon*)
TRT6 – TRT Kurdish language channel
TTB – Turkish Medical Association (*Türk Tabipleri Birliği*)
TÜSIAD – Turkish Industrialists and Businessmen’s Association (*Türk Sanayicileri ve İşadamları Derneği*)
UN – United Nations
WSF – World Social Forum
Yapı Yol Sen – Retired Road, Construction, Infrastructure, Land Deeds and Registry Workers' Union (*Yol, Yapı, Altyapı, Tapu ve Kadastro Emekçileri Sendikası*)
Yeşiller – Greens (Green Party of Turkey)
YXXKF - Federation of Students and Workers of Kurdistan in France

Introduction

What the research is (not) about

Engaging with the question of transnational political activism and its effects on internal conflict, this dissertation inquires into the efforts of Kurdish political activists in Europe related to Turkey and its Kurdish question. In particular, the research has sought to uncover the diplomatic activities developed by Kurdish activists inside the European Institutions. In what ways do Turkey's Kurds take advantage of the ongoing accession negotiations between the EU and Turkey in order to press forward their political claims? This research has aimed at assessing the institutional operation of this particular kind of transnational political activism and, ultimately, its impact back home on Turkey's approach towards the Kurdish issue.

The research has very much been confined to the study of political elites and the networks they have built over time, as well as the strategies and discourse they have developed. It has thus *not* engaged with the Kurds in Europe generally, or the 'European Kurdish Diaspora'. The research does not look into the question why people of Kurdish origin who fled or migrated from their country, or were born in Europe of Kurdish refugees or migrants, continue to identify themselves with the developments in their region of origin (Khayati 2008, Kastoryano 2006, Alinia 2004, Ögelman 2003); nor does it address the issue of why some people of Kurdish origin choose to engage with transnational political activism in order to bring about change at home (Grojean 2008). The research also eschews investigation into the different action repertoires of the Kurdish movement's political mobilization in Europe, or understanding Kurdish militancy for the PKK amongst European Kurds (Grojean 2008); and it abstains from any assessment of how an imagined Kurdish transnational community is being constructed and maintained over time (Soğuk 2008, Khayati 2008, Emanuelsson 2005, Watts 2004). The reasons for this are quite straightforward: other empirically based research has already engaged in depth with these inquiries.

Regarding the study of the lobbying activities of Kurds in Europe, the research undertaken by Østergaard-Nielsen in the late 1990s has been important, with its investigation into the transnational political practices of Turks and Kurds in Germany (2001, 2003) and the Netherlands (2001), as also has been Eccarius-Kelly's comparison of the various political opportunity structures (POS) for Kurdish activism in Turkey, Germany and the European Union (2002). Indeed, it was Eccarius-Kelly who, on the basis of this general comparison, concluded that *"The POS determinants indicate that Kurdish challenger groups enjoy a growing array of political opportunities within the European structures. Kurdish activists articulate their opposition to state repression, systematic racism, and discrimination by effectively promoting Kurdish socio-political,*

cultural, and ethnic demands in Europe. It is increasingly noticeable that the Turkish government faces scrutiny from an entire network of supranational European agencies with overlapping branches that ensure compliance with human rights standards” (Eccarius-Kelly 2002: 113). My research takes up from where she left off, by unravelling in more detail how the European Union has become a site of political contestation for Turkey’s Kurdish nationalist movement.

Conducted over the past four years, the research presented here offers new insights into the realities of Kurdish diplomacy, differing in several respects from the above mentioned studies. The originality of the findings relate to the fact that I conducted my fieldwork in the years following the start of the accession negotiations, and not in the lead-up to them. They also relate to the fact that I have worked both inside the European Institutions and also with the various relevant activist and support networks, at the national (Belgium and Turkey), regional (Flanders and Turkey’s Kurdish Southeast) and local (Diyarbakir) levels.

This research has been very much centered on the *agents* of transnational political activism, rather than the structural conditions that (would) allow for its existence (Koopmans & Statham 2005, Eccarius-Kelly 2002). Most of the articles were written from an agency-oriented perspective, incorporating the ways that the political actors studied present their problems and develop coalitions (Smith & Bakker 2005). In particular, I have devoted attention to the role of those at the ‘receiving end’ in transnational political activism, in this case European politicians at different political levels, and their receptiveness to Kurdish demands, inquiring not only about their motivations, but also tracing back the genealogies of cooperation between different actors over time that attest to current networks of support and access, in Flemish and European politics.

In addition to the focus on European politicians as agents within transnational political activism, particular attention has also been devoted to the *PKK*, its related associations and affiliated political party, as the main agents of Kurdish activism in both Turkey and Europe. Important in that regards is that my research covers the post-9/11 period whereas the former research was conducted in the decade prior to this, i.e. the 1990s. Special attention has therefore been paid to the restraints that the PKK’s listing as an international terrorist organization has had upon Kurdish (transnational) political activism in Europe and Turkey. Further to this, the PKK itself underwent an ideological and organizational transformation around the turn of the millennium, which has also affected how the Kurdish issue has been expressed inside Turkey and in relation to different international actors. Finally, Turkey itself has seen internal political change during the current decade, which has also impacted on the Southeast and its ‘Kurdish problem’.

Having contributed significantly to in the internationalization of the Kurdish issue since the 1980s, the role of *Human Rights Associations* also came to the fore during the course of the fieldwork, which led to a sub-study of their changing relationship with the Turkish authorities under the supervision of the European Union following Turkey's acceptance into the accession process in 2004. This sub-study also provides more insight into the side-lining of the Kurdish nationalist movement in Turkey and Europe, which is discussed at various points of this dissertation and especially in the appended articles.

Finally, I have sought to incorporate the changing political dynamics inside Turkey into my analysis, conceiving of the Kurdish political activists' strategies, actions and discourse in Europe as intimately related to the (changing) political realities 'back home' in Turkey. Indeed, I have considered Europe and Turkey as part of an extended political space within which Kurdish political activists operate: thus my title specifying *The Kurdish nationalist movement (in-)between Turkey and Europe. Transnational political activism and transformation of home through the EU*. Before summarizing the main findings of this research, I situate my work in the literature on transnational political activism and transnational advocacy networks, and then introduce my case, that of the Kurdish nationalist movement.

Transnational political activism through the EU

Transnational political activism

This dissertation takes as its starting point the literature and the developing field of *transnationalism studies*. Transnationalism has come to refer in the broadest sense to "multiple ties and interactions linking people or institutions across the borders of nation-states" (Vertovec 1999: 447), or "processes and activities that transcend international borders" (Baubock 2008: 2), although even these characterizations imply a distinction of transnationalism from the universal impact of globalization, insofar as the ties and processes occur within the limited social and geographic spaces of particular sets of countries. More specifically, transnationalism applies to "the cross-border activities of NGOs and social protest movements, to the migration flows that link specific sending and receiving countries, as well as the ongoing ties migrants retain with their countries of origin" (Baubock 2008: 2).

Studies of transnationalism have primarily engaged with the study of migration and immigrant behavior. Concretely, transnationalism studies have focused on the contacts immigrants sustain with their country of origin and the ways this gives shape to transnational communities (Portes 1997, Westwood & Phizaklea 2000, Al-Ali & Köser 2002, Kivisto 2003, Nell 2004); on the effects of transnationalism on questions of citizenship (Faist 1999, Koopmans et al. 2005, Engbersen et al. 2006) and assimilation

(Guarnizo & Portes 2003); on the policies pursued by the governments of the countries of origin that seek to sustain the loyalty of emigrant nationals (Portes 1999, Itzighsohn, 2008, Margheritis 2007); and on the explanatory factors for the existence or absence and/or (dis)continuation of the transnational political engagements of immigrants (Eccarius-Kelly 2002, Adamson 2001, Guarnizo et al. 2003, Koopmans et al. 2005). In general, research in Europe has – contrary to the research in the United States – focused on the politics of integration and assimilation, rather than ethnic lobbying and homeland politics (Martiniello & Lafleur 2008).

One of the more profound challenges in transnationalism studies has been to move beyond the trap of '*methodologic nationalism*', which is the naturalization of the nation-state by the social sciences (Glick Schiller & Wimmer 2002). Schiller and Wimmer identified three variants of methodological nationalism, which have mutually reinforced one another: (1) the ignorance or disregard of the fundamental importance of nationalism for modern societies; (2) the taking for granted of the boundaries of the nation-state as what limits and defines the unit of analysis; and (3) the territorial limitations that confine the study of social processes to the political and geographic boundaries of a particular nation-state (Glick Schiller & Wimmer 2002). Consequently, the study of nationalism and state building has, for a very long time, suffered from territorial confinements. This explains why the role of immigrants and refugees in particular within these political projects generally remained under the radar of political and social scientists until the early 1990s. Since then, transnationalism studies has emerged as a new research field, with an increasing number of studies.

Despite gaining particular attention in the social sciences, the study of transnationalism and 'transnational political practices' remained largely unexplored in the political sciences, since it fell between the cracks of comparative politics and the study of international relations (Adamson 2002: 155-56). Research with regards to transnational political practices and the role of immigrants as actors in conflicts did not really begin to be published until the beginning of the 2000s, by for example Østergaard-Nielsen (2003), Shain & Barth (2003), Al-Ali & Köser (2002) and Kent (2006). These studies did not, however, focus closely on the determining role of socio-political movements or agency in general within transnationalism. Instead, the political opportunity structures – the 'exogenous factors' enhancing or inhibiting political mobilization (see Meyer & Minkoff 2004), and in particular the political environments of the countries of settlement – tended to predetermine the kinds of transnational political practices one was to expect.

Studies structured around political opportunities (POS) as the main concept by which to understand political action by social (political) movements have come under criticism from a number of scholars. For example, numerous instances of social movement mobilization in contexts where political opportunities are 'contracting' have been identified, cases in which mobilization has often been a defensive response to these

contractions (Goodwin, Jasper & Khattrra 1999). More fundamentally, criticism has focused especially on what may be described as an overly deterministic perspective, one that lacks a sense of agency: “[...] *people’s intentions, choices and discretion disappear in a mechanical play of structures*” (Jasper, 1997); “*Analysts do not ask why some people become inclined to protest, or why some states use their repressive capacities*” (Goodwin, Jasper & Khattrra 1999: 34). Indeed, Goodwin, Jasper & Khattrra have argued that there are an extraordinarily large number of processes and events that influence the mobilization of movements, and that they do so in historically complex combinations and sequences (ibid: 36). They argue that we should, instead of conceiving of opportunities in terms of strict structural conditions, we ought to think of them as “[...] *a shifting playing field, with various institutions, cultural constructions, and strategic players,*” in order to see that “[...] *political action (and the impulses, grievances, and interests that go into it) is both channeled and created in a variety of ways without having to lapse into “window” metaphors*” (ibid: 37), referring to ‘windows of opportunity’. Thus the conclusion, that “[...] *institutions inspire and demand action as well as constrain it*” (ibid:37).

Like social networks and formal organizations, ‘mobilizing structures’ are not necessarily pre-existing structures but are often themselves creations of movement organizers (Goodwin, Jasper & Khattrra 1999: 41). Within these networks there is strategic reasoning and action based on commitment to a cause; ideas and affective bonds are important to keep them together (ibid 1999: 46). Olivier Grojean’s work has been groundbreaking in this sense, arguing for the need to ‘bring the organization back in’ (2008, 2011). Indeed, his work explains why much research tends to miss the fundamental importance of the (relative) autonomy of the agents of transnational political activism, and the importance of inquiries related to this. Issues arising in this context importantly include ways in which both homeland political developments and the interactions with other (competitive) political actors at home and abroad inform these agents and consequently the particular (transnational) political activities they undertake.

Going beyond a strict POS approach in her research on the political mobilization of Turks and Kurds in Germany, Østergaard-Nielsen related the choice of political strategies not only to the political opportunity structures in the country of settlement, but also to the particular movement/organization’s agenda, its degree of opposition to or support of the homeland regime, and the extent to which its agenda is compatible with the agenda of the political actors in the host country (Østergaard-Nielsen 2002: 186). She distinguished four types of ‘Diaspora political activities’ of Kurds from Turkey in Western Europe: (1) confrontational and illegal activities (such as attacks on property, unannounced demonstrations, etc); (2) confrontational and legal activities (such as political mass meetings, demonstrations and hunger strikes), (3) institutional participation as independent organizations (including events co-organized with political institutions of the country of settlement, like seminars, panel discussions and individual

meetings with politicians); and (4) institutional participation in the country of settlement's political institutions (such as membership of and representation in trade unions or political parties). The type of homeland politics I studied was largely confined to the third one, that is the institutional participation of Kurdish associations as independent organizations reaching out to different levels of policy making in the countries of settlement (and Europe). We can question though if we are to consider my case as a case of 'diaspora political activities', and I will try to explain why it is problematic to regard it as such.

Diaspora and Diaspora politics?

There is a growing literature that addresses the Kurds in Europe as a 'Diaspora'. A Diaspora is typically defined as a self-identified ethnic group, with a specific place of origin, which has been globally dispersed through voluntary or forced migration (Vertovec 2006). The term 'Diaspora' does not stand in isolation, however, as it assumes a context in which things like dispersal, migration and exile occur, namely the political definition of territory. The dispersal is not primarily geographical, for distance itself is not necessarily important – on the contrary, what is conceptually fundamental to Diaspora is the idea of the nation-state. In the words of Braziel and Mannur, "*Diaspora refers specifically to the movement – forced or voluntary – of people from one or more nation-states to another*" (Braziel & Mannur 2003: 8). The idea of Diaspora is thus also intimately bound up in notions of nation and nationalism. Thus we are invited to 'theorize diaspora' as offering "*critical spaces for thinking about the discordant movements of modernity*", but which should not be "*divorced from historical and cultural specificity*" (ibid: 3).

The notion of Diaspora requires further definition, however, to specify its distinction from other similar and related terms, like 'émigré' and 'the ex-pat community'. In this vein, Brubaker has problematized the conceptual fuzziness around 'Diaspora', as having given birth to a '*Diaspora of Diaspora*' (Brubaker 2005). He proposes we talk of a Diaspora not as an entity or a bounded group, but instead of diasporic stances, projects, claims, idioms and practices. The implied critique is that the concept of Diaspora has been reified, and the proposed solution that Diaspora should be regarded as a category of practice. We should refrain, it is suggested, from referring to a dispersed group to which its assumed members might not be committed to any diasporic project: "*The "groupness" of putative diasporas, like that of putative "nations", is precisely what is at stake in [political, social and cultural] struggles*" (Brubaker 2005: 13). 'Diaspora' is used to make claims, articulate projects, formulate expectations, mobilize energies and appeal to loyalties. Thus it does not so much describe the world but seeks to remake it. Indeed, as one investigates institutions and agents one does indeed become aware of the fact that the Diaspora is an entity under construction, even though it is so often described as something that is 'already there', a group, a fixed reference point.

Taking the discussion further, Sökefeld has argued in favor of a social movement approach to the subject. If we designate immigrant populations as diasporas, we ignore the historical contingency the nation-state, identity and community and reify them as natural facts (Soysal 2000 in Sökefeld, 2006). Instead, Diasporas should be defined as 'imagined transnational communities', that is, as imaginations of community that unite segments of people who live in territorially separated locations. *"There can be no diaspora community without a consciousness of diaspora, in other words, without an idea of shared identity, of common belonging to that group."* (Sökefeld 2006: 267). Thus migrants may maintain transnational ties, but, without an imagination of community that exceeds the ties themselves, they do not form a Diaspora (Ibid, 2006: 268). Diasporas are therefore an outcome of social mobilization. And Diasporas importantly develop through taking-up 'homeland' – national(ist) – issues that cannot be articulated in the country of origin. This introduces the notion of transnationalism as implicit in many of the ways in which Diasporas develop these homeland issues – including those of institutional participation, the focus here – that is, by means of network formation and collective action and specific associations which sustain the discourse of community and mobilize practices (2006: 269-270).

The modes of imagination are historically contingent, so the articulation of the common imagination is a political process related to a particular politics of identity that connects individual subjects to a community through constant calls on experiences and (supposedly) shared memories (Sökefeld & Schwalgin, 2000: 3). The mythical history that classically features in the construction of nationhood is reproduced in the displaced people as a myth of experience – typically, a common suffering of denied rights – so as to define the communal identity in terms of the homeland. Moreover, this is a dynamic definition, one that calls on that mythic experience (those rights denied) to be somehow recognized in concrete reality, a nationalist 'call to arms' (which may even be a literal call). Clearly then, there is a pressing need to look at the agents that produce, reproduce and spread the imaginations of 'community' (ibid).

In this research I have looked into agents – organizations and individuals – that are involved in the construction of a Kurdish Diaspora. Referring to Kurdish transnational political activism as 'Diaspora politics' is still problematic, however. In the case of the Kurds from Turkey, one actor has become dominant in the transnational political space and this actor is not 'diasporic', in the sense that it did not originate from exile, but from inside Turkey (even though its leadership was indeed based in Syria during the 1980s and 1990s, see below). The PKK started to organize itself transnationally in the early 1980s, seeking to penetrate existing Kurdish (and Turkish) migrant organizations in Europe while at the same time as developing its own associational life.¹ The PKK has

¹ Occasional mention is made in the articles compiled here of the PKK in relation to its eastwards cross-border organization. A definition of the PKK in transnational terms as based in and connected to (organizations in) Syria, Iraq and Iran might be objected to by Kurdish nationalists on the grounds that these are areas of south and east Kurdistan, part a single territory and thus by definition non-

been able to call on Kurds living outside Turkey's boundaries, and establish a strong presence in Europe. In that sense, the PKK has been able to contribute significantly to the formation of a Kurdish Diaspora in the meaning of Sökefeld's 'imagined transnational community' – but it still is first and foremost a Turkey-based political movement, and not a Diasporic organization. Nevertheless, because of the ways in which it has developed a political space for itself that transgresses state borders and interacts with a variety of actors and institutions outside of Turkey, it does constitute a *transnational* political movement.

For a long time throughout the research I employed the term 'Diaspora' in the way criticized above, that is, as a dispersed ethnic group, referring to all Kurds living in Europe instead of just those actively identifying themselves as part of a (transnational) imagined Kurdish community. I struggled with this definition, because the word 'Kurdish Diaspora' and 'Diaspora politics' would imply that all Kurds would be identifying themselves in terms of the collective, with a political agenda. My research however soon revealed that the actual Kurdish political activists, particularly those involved in lobby work, were small in numbers. That I struggled with the question how to define the 'Diaspora' and differentiate it from 'Kurds living in Europe' can be understood from the paper on the gatekeepers, where I used the word 'Diaspora politics' interchangeably with 'transnational political activism', and in other articles in which I appropriated phrases like 'politicized Kurds' when I wanted to address those involved in transnational political activism but distinguish them from what I thought of as 'the Diaspora' (meaning, at that time, all Kurds living in exile). The terminology that I have previously employed is thus, in retrospect, not unproblematic, and I would certainly wish to devote more attention to a rigorous (and internally consistent) use of concepts if I were to re-do or republish the articles that constitute this PhD.

Initially this research aimed to uncover the transnational political activities of Kurdish immigrants and refugees in Europe, directed to bring about political change in Turkey. However, the fieldwork for this research showed that it is very difficult to untangle the actions of European Kurds from the actions of Kurdish activists in (and from) Turkey: The transnational political activities of Kurds in Europe involve both 'homeland politics', for those Kurdish activists who are part of that growing Kurdish Diaspora in Europe, as well as 'oppositional politics' for those Kurdish activists that are based in (or moving back and forth to) Turkey, but engage with the internationalization of the Kurdish issue in Europe. Homeland politics are thus reinforcing the oppositional politics of the Kurdish nationalist movement. Or, put differently, in the Kurdish case the oppositional political actors are transnationally active and make use of the existing Kurdish (Diaspora) associations in order to establish a transnational political space and extend their sphere of influence.

transnational. This would introduce some interesting complications, which are not considered here purely because the focus of this research was on Europe and the EU.

In the paper that deals with the Demirbaş case (Chapter 3), I used the phrase ‘oppositional homeland political actors’ and pointed out how these made use of immigrant and refugee organizations, in order, primarily, to distinguish the Europe-based from the Turkey-based actors. With ‘oppositional homeland political actors’, I refer in my dissertation to members of the Kurdish nationalist movement based in Turkey (in this case either part of the Kurdistan Workers’ Party associational network or members of the Kurdish DTP/BDP), actively opposing and seeking to transform Turkey from within (but utilizing support for people and organizations based predominantly in other European states).

Transnational advocacy networks

Besides drawing on the study of immigrant transnationalism, this research also employs the social movement literature of transnational advocacy networks. “A *transnational advocacy network includes those actors working internationally on an issue, who are bound together by shared values, a common discourse, and dense exchange of information and services*” (Keck & Sikkink 1999: 89). These networks provide opportunities to mobilize information strategically so as to persuade, pressurize and gain leverage over more powerful organizations and governments (Keck & Sikkink 1999: 89). The political roles of activist NGOs in transnational advocacy networks are simultaneously domestic and international (ibid.: 92). Transnational advocacy networks emerge around issues where the channels between domestic groups and their governments are hampered or severed – indeed, when the links between state and domestic actors are severed, domestic NGOs may directly seek international allies to try bring pressures on their states from outside. Keck and Sikkink characterize this as “*the boomerang pattern of influence characteristic of transnational networks where the target of their activity is to change a state’s behaviour*”, explained thus: “*Where governments are unresponsive to groups whose claims may none the less resonate elsewhere, international contacts can ‘amplify’ the demands of domestic groups, pry open space for new issues, and then echo these demands back into the domestic arena*” (ibid.).

The strategies of transnational advocacy networks are similar to those of political groups or social movements, but they emphasize the use of the power of their information, ideas and strategies to alter the information and value context within which states make policies (Keck & Sikkink 1999: 95). The information that flows through such networks is not only factual, but also testimonial, the stories of those affected. The facts and testimonies are interpreted, framed and formulated in terms of right and wrong, intended to persuade individuals and stimulate action (ibid: 96).

In this study I did not observe a strict divide between transnational political activist networks and transnational advocacy networks. What I have observed is that the networks established by Kurdish transnational activists in Western Europe connect or

intertwine with transnational advocacy networks. In Turkey, the strong state tradition had for a long time restricted the space for organized action, and the constitution established in 1982 provided the legal framework that prevented the mobilization and organization of civil society (Kadirbeyoğlu 2005, Dorronsoro 2005). With the country's internal democracy thus disabled, a number of associations that developed inside Turkey forged strong ties with international advocacy networks, in a double effort to indirectly affect change at home and ensure themselves a minimum level of protection (i.e. through the backing of these international organizations). This was particularly the case for the human rights associations in Turkey, which from the 1990s onwards became increasingly occupied with the Kurdish Question. A number of domestic Human Rights NGOs and Kurdish associations in Europe became part of transnational advocacy networks that defend human rights, aligning themselves with Amnesty International and *Fondation Internationale des Droits de l'Homme* (FIDH) (See Chapter 4). On other issues, such as political decentralization and local autonomy, the Kurdish party-run municipalities sought to involve themselves in advocacy networks that unite different municipalities worldwide (see Chapter 3), and thereby increase their leverage in Turkey through the main EU institutions. It has indeed been argued that 'outsiders' often hold the key to collective action, since they are able to advise on organization, laws and the political landscape, as well as supporting movements in their associations with the political authorities (Foweraker, 1995 in Kadirbeyoğlu 2004). In my research I have devoted attention to how these forms of cooperation have played out within the context of the Turkey-EU accession negotiations.

The PKK originally emerged from a background of leftwing oriented groups in Ankara and as such, always had a strong leftward leaning (Jongerden & Akkaya 2011). The organization's first violent acts, were directed at Kurdish landowners, representative in PKK eyes of the backward, repressive system of tribal feudalism in the region (Ibid). With the huge presence of PKK in the Kurdish nationalist movement as a whole, the latter has, therefore, tended toward the left in its domestic political outlook. It is in this context that the movement has also developed relationships with a part of the international leftist scene, through participation in the social forums organized in different cities around the world since the birth of the Global Justice Movement in Seattle, 1999 (Della Porta 2007).

By connecting to outside actors over multiple sites and becoming part of transnational networks, local Kurdish activists – oppositional homeland political actors – have enabled themselves to become involved in politics even though they were originally excluded from the political process inside their own country, and thus found themselves originally on the periphery of globalization (see Sassen 2004). More generally, this has contributed to their role as key players in the developing political domain, as Turkey and its Southeast eventually emerged from the decades of centrally imposed restrictions (and oppression). Generally without close connections to the centers of power in Ankara, and starting from the peripheral position of semi-legality and vulnerability to closure, legal

harassment and the like, the various organizations associated with the Kurdish nationalist movement (primarily its main political party) and those working with issues in the region (particularly the human rights groups) found themselves positioned outside their country's hegemonic system (a position only emphasized by their left-leaning tendencies in a strongly conservative political milieu). This in turn informed and underscored their own outsider position in the European institutional framework, a position already defined by Turkey's own outsider position. In terms of transnational advocacy, therefore, the Kurdish movement historically had to operate from a doubly excluded position.

Through the EU

Central to the transnational political activism of Turkey's Kurds has been the question of Turkey's bid for membership of the European Union. Several authors have argued how the EU accession negotiations have positively affected Turkey's approach to its longstanding Kurdish issue, i.e. encouraged a more liberal, pluralistic and less authoritarian, adversarial approach to the problem from Ankara (Gunter 2008, Tocci 2005, Çelik & Rumelili 2006). In general there is a strong relationship between European integration and peace (Diez et al. 2008, Çelik & Rumelili 2006). Even though the European Union has never played a major diplomatic mediation role in the conflict, the position of Kurds and the protection of human rights in general have benefited from the contractual ties between the EU and Turkey (Tocci 2005: 126, Yildiz & Muller 2008). The European Union is thus a party to the conflict and Turkey's Kurdish issue generally (Çelik & Rumelili 2006).

The EU institutions became increasingly vocal on the Kurdish question during the heat of the PKK/Turkish state armed conflict in the 1990s when also Turkey's application for EU membership was under consideration. The European Parliament in particular spelled out long lists of recommendations to Turkey (Tocci 2005: 133, Grojean 2008). Following the 1999 acceptance of Turkey as a candidate for EU membership Turkey's administration in Ankara undertook reforms in order to comply with the Copenhagen Criteria, necessary for the EU's opening of the accession negotiations. Between 1999 and 2005 the (relative) credibility of the EU accession process contributed directly to Turkey's progress on human rights and democratic governance, two of the main principles of the Copenhagen Criteria (Uğur 2003 in Tocci 2005: 138). Since December 2004, when it was determined that Turkey had 'sufficiently' fulfilled the Criteria, EU institutions have tried to induce political reform over the course of the accession negotiations, monitoring Turkey's political progress through the system of annual country reports. This, as we will see, provides opportunities for Kurdish political activists to affect the ongoing process of change in Turkey (i.e. through the accession process).

Besides the membership conditionality, Çelik and Rumelili have pointed at other ways in which the EU affects domestic change (see Diez, Stetter, and Albert 2004, in Çelik & Rumelili 2006). The EU provides an ideal or normative structure for the rationalization and legitimization of alternative policy options. The very concrete operation in Turkey of this rather abstract notion is evident from the way the phrase 'European standards' (*Avrupa standartları*) is routinely employed in the public discourse. At the societal level, the EU selectively directs material resources to a range of non-governmental initiatives including those promoting social collaboration and advocating peaceful resolution to disputes. The main EU bodies consider support directed to civil society actors as the most effective instrument of conflict resolution (Pace 2004 in Çelik & Rumelili 2006). Indeed, the European Parliament and Commission in particular are known to be receptive to civil society organizations, with the European Commission actively soliciting the input of (international) NGOs (Joachim & Locher 2009). In addition to this, the EU indirectly provides a discursive structure about a common European identity, that allows identity and conflict discourses to be rewritten at the societal level (Çelik & Rumelili 2006), as is illustrated in the Demirbaş-case discussed in Chapter 3 of this PhD.

Çelik & Rumelili argued that it is due to Turkey's involvement in the European integration process that the Turkish state started treating the Kurdish issue as a 'democratization issue', and not merely as development and terrorism problems. They point out that the NGOs representing demands of Kurds have all referred to the EU as the most important actor bringing the conflict towards a stage of resolution (2006). I would argue that it was also very much due to the role which these NGOs themselves played in exposing different kinds of violations and the need for change that led the EU to advance in this direction. A number of NGOs working locally or regionally (or nationally) inside Turkey have inscribed themselves into transnational advocacy networks (see above) and have developed strong relationships with Europe-based Kurdish associations. It is these activists that had been the 'bell-ringers' during the years of conflict that preceded the opening of the accession negotiations and have continued to (try to) play that role since (Chapters 1-4).

The EU approach to the Kurdish question has always been generalized, not advocating a specific solution other than one that is political and non-military, and that includes the recognition of Kurdish cultural identity, respect for the democratic practice, human rights and the rule of law (Tocci 2005). This vagueness, not only with regards to the Kurdish question, but also more generally, means that it is hard to assess when the conditions will be fulfilled. As there are no details of the expected reforms, no minimum standards or benchmarks, Turkish authorities can feel that enough has been done while the EU does not and can continue to come up with newly phrased conditions, ultimately leading to an erosion of trust on both sides (Tocci 2005: 142). This is obviously reinforced with the recently increased political debate in Europe over Turkey's ultimate accession. The less clear the prospect of Turkey's eventual accession becomes, even as a possibility, the less the European Union can impact on Turkey's Kurdish issue (Tocci

2005; Çelik & Rumelili 2006). During the course of my research, EU-reform fatigue in Turkey and its sense of goalposts being moved grew visibly, and this will also, and is actually already affecting the Kurdish nationalist movement's transnational politics (see Chapter 5 and 6).

The Kurdish nationalist movement

Attention has been paid to some of the assumptions behind the title of this dissertation in respect of transnational political activism in the European (EU) and Turkish (Southeastern) context, including my process of understanding of the term 'Diaspora', itself evolving in the literature. A few lines dealing with the first part of the title of this dissertation, 'the Kurdish national movement', are in order too. Taking the constituent parts in reverse order, first the word 'movement' implies leaders, organisation, a mass (of supporters), a core, a center, fuzzy edges, a basic direction, splits, intra-dynamics, etc. In the current context, it is pertinent to note, the Turkish word for movement '*hareket*', is used also to mean '*the movement*', i.e. the PKK – just as in Turkey the words '*terrorist örgüt*' (terrorist organization), used together as a phrase but also separately, are also employed to refer to the PKK.

The term 'nationalist' is somewhat equivocal. On one level it relates to nation in the sense of a people, a (constructed) ethno-cultural identity. On another level however, and more commonly, it relates to the claim of a people – or nation – to jurisdiction over a piece of territory, the nation-state born of nineteenth century (ideal of) liberal democracy. In this sense, a nationalist movement is making a claim for statehood, or at least for a level of autonomy within a state. Any such ambiguity here on my part is, I would argue, actually entirely appropriate, as the movement itself is ambiguous on this, with a variety of approaches that have changed over time. Currently, for example, the PKK publicly advocates for a form of federalism within Turkey, a professed desire which may really be masking a continued, long-term desire for independence, while local councils get on with the work of changing things under the existing arrangements (Chapters 3 and 6).

The idea of 'Kurdish nationalism' also equivocates. In the broadest sense, it implies the desire for a unified Kurdistan, spanning the northwestern Middle East, rather like the ancient maps of Upper or Northern Mesopotamia –to which claim is made in a new twist to Kurdish nationalist identity formation (Chapter 6). More narrowly, however, 'Kurdish nationalism' refers only to the Turkish (or Iraqi) context (and generally not to the Syrian or Iranian). Indeed, relations between the different Kurdish groups vying and claiming to represent (parts of) the Kurdish population(s) have been varied and complex over the years. The current situation, including the different (cross) state / Kurdish relationships is no less complex. Little mention is made of this in the current work, focusing as it does westward, on Europe in respect to the Turkish case.

With 'the Kurdish nationalist movement', I refer in general to all those sympathizing with or political engaged in the promotion of Kurdist demands. The focus of Turkey is assumed throughout, but the epithet 'Turkey's Kurdish nationalist movement' – or, alternatively, 'the Kurdish nationalist movement in Turkey' – is not used, as it might be taken to mitigate against the European dimension of transnationalism. 'The Kurdish nationalist movement' refers to all the different strands of Kurdish nationalists, their leaders, organizations and followers, in Turkey and outside (basically that is, here, Turkey and Europe). Although these various strands are clearly distinguishable, the supposed singularity of movement internally split, sometimes riven – most obviously, perhaps, over the place that violence has in the struggle – there *is* a common sense of purpose, a shared struggle, of over-arching or general demands that have become shared by all, incorporating wishes and needs from a broad range of political and societal actors in the Kurdish Southeast (e.g. see Kurban and Ensaroğlu for TESEV, 2009).

Regarding nomenclature, the word 'Kurdistan' is occasionally employed, but it is a term I prefer to steer clear of. Although the use of this name – like that of Palestine – has value in criticism of injustice for those whose rights are violated daily, and names like 'the Southeast' do, admittedly, deny the pan-Kurdish nationalist perspective – for whom the Southeast, i.e. southeast Anatolia, is actually the Northwest, i.e. northwest Kurdistan – avoidance of the name 'Kurdistan' still seems preferable to me. Thus the term 'Turkish Kurdistan' is not used here, except once, to quote its use by Flemish sympathizers (Chapter 1). There are three main reasons for this. First, this approach does recognise current political realities, insofar as the southeast of Turkey is just that, a part of the internationally recognised UN member state, the Republic of Turkey; and, whereas the larger part of the Kurdish population in (the southeast of) Turkey, it may be claimed, do today aspire to some form of regional autonomy, there is not a generalized desire for secession. Secondly, employment of the term 'Kurdistan' is (remains) unnecessarily provocative for a Turkish audience, some of the very readers that advocates of human rights – among whom I would certainly count myself – would seek to reach in this discussion. I do not see the articles gathered here as underwriting the Kurdish cause – for which reason, it may be noted, this dissertation would figure in the literature of Kurdish Studies only at a tangent. Thirdly, and very simply, 'Kurdistan' is generally taken to refer to northern Iraq these days.

The terms 'pro-Kurdish' and 'Kurdist' are sometimes employed here, in the main chapters. Essentially, the former I came to through the work of Nicole Watts (2006), and the latter through Olivier Grojean (2008). 'Pro-Kurdish' has the merit of remaining open-ended about the specifics of end goals: one can be strongly pro-Kurdish in a cultural context without necessarily wishing to have this translated overtly much in the political arena. Indeed, it is arguably the 'nationalist' element of the Kurdish movement that takes us into confrontation politics, specifically, the confrontation with Turkish nationalism. The lack of end-goal specification is at the same time, however, a weakness of this term: 'Pro-Kurdish' seems a little vague, covering too much. Almost anyone could be, in some

sense, pro-Kurdish. The term 'Kurdish' on the other hand, appears to have a harder edge, and does suggest the commitment of believers, of passion perhaps, of ideals. However, while this certainly avoids the undefined nature of 'pro-Kurdish', it would seem also to imply reference especially to the core of activists, which is too narrow for my purposes. That said, the term 'Kurdish' is used here, like that of 'pro-Kurdish', and both interchangeably with 'the Kurdish nationalist movement', itself shortened to 'the Kurdish movement'. This is another instance of hindsight – a proper review and re-editing of the material contained here would focus on a more consistent and nuanced use of this nomenclature.

The case of Turkey's Kurds and the PKK as transnational political organization

Turkey's Kurdish issue is a long-standing one, as old as the establishment of the Turkish Republic.² With the end of WWI, demands for a Kurdish national territory led to this being mooted by the Allies as one part of the project of dismantling and portioning out the rump Ottoman Empire. The victory, however, of Turkish (and Kurdish) forces in the subsequent war against the Greeks (and Western imperial powers) prevented this idea from going any further than the mapping stage (Olson 1989). The 1920 Treaty of Sèvres was replaced by the Lausanne Treaty of 1923, the Sultan by Mustafa Kemal. Muslim sovereignty in Anatolia was maintained, but under a Turkish nationalist leadership.

The establishment of the nation-state involved the introduction of a more centralized authority than had been maintained under the old imperial system, as the leaders of the new Republic set about creating a country and, at the same time, bringing it into the twentieth century, rather like as in the Soviet Union. This directly affected the traditional social-political configurations in the southeastern Kurdish majority provinces (Taspinar 2005, McDowall 1996). These Kurdish provinces – like others – had enjoyed a long history of quasi-autonomy under the Ottoman Empire, so the imposition of Ankara's authority met with resistance from local political and religious leaders. This was only exacerbated as many of them were first undermined when the Caliphate was abolished by the new, secular regime, and then had their power base ripped away as religious brotherhoods were forced to go underground. The peoples living on the territories of the new republic became the subject of a nationalist project to establish a homogenous nation of Turkish citizens expected to express loyalty to the Turkish state, its founder and its ideology. This was executed through the introduction in the 1920s and 30s of a series of radical laws, which became known as Atatürk's Reforms, or Revolutions (*Atatürk Devrimleri*). In addition to the dismantling of religious structures mentioned, these included a headgear dress code (effectively ousting the Muslim clerics) and a

² Shortened versions of (aspects of) this brief history are presented in Chapter 1 (focusing on the Kurdish nationalist movement in Turkey), and Chapter 5 (focusing on the PKK insurgency).

unified Turkish language (cleansed from Arabic influences), along with a compulsory national education system and universal (male) military service.

In eastern Anatolia, which had never been part of the heartland of the Ottoman Empire, several rebellions were instigated during this period (most famously those of Sheikh Said, in 1925, and Dersim, in 1937). Although generally regarded as Kurdish, nationalist aspirations actually had varying levels of importance in these insurrections: they have also to be considered against the background of Turkish Republican state-building, and are thus as much about local religious and tribal loyalties and a rejection of an imposed 'modernism' as about the identity and rights of Kurds as a people. What is beyond doubt, however, is that they were all swiftly dealt with, through the use of what would now be termed 'overwhelming force'. Then, following these rebellions the Kurdish Southeast met with episodes of severe military repression, including the dispersal and deportation of problematic communities and their leaders, and resettlement of parts of the population (Taspinar 2005). Turkish officials sought to prevent the collective expression of Kurdishness (and other ethnicities), eventually denying even their very existence (Watts 2006, Öktem 2004, Yavuz 2001, Barkey & Fuller 1998).

Ataturk's Republican People's Party ruled virtually uncontested after the extinction of the only real Turkish political opposition in 1925 (the Progressive Republican Party, which was blamed for the Sheikh Said uprising and its leaders assassinated or imprisoned). With the post-WWII introduction of an electoral Parliamentary system, however, the Kurdish notables began to develop clientelist relationships with the ruling political parties, delivering block votes in return for increased leverage over land and the provision of basic services to the people (not dissimilarly, in fact, to the old Ottoman system). These Kurdish leaders were able to take part in public life and even pursue successful careers in Turkish politics, so long as they avoided any explicit reference to individual and collective Kurdish identity (Taspinar 2005). Clientelist patronage networks developed in particular following the election of the Democrat Party in 1950 as, for the first time in Turkey's modern history, the Republican People's Party was ousted from power (Bozarslan 2008, Taspinar 2005).

The incoming Democrat Party had developed (and partly through) significant ties to the religious leaders and brotherhoods that had lost their power and status. As a result, the country's established political elite – the military and Republican People's Party – considered the new ruling party responsible for the rise in both Kurdish and Islamic consciousness that developed during the 1950s. In 1960 the military intervened, ostensibly the first of the country's army coups, although at the same time merely a reassertion of the power won in 1923. Hundreds of Kurdish landlords were charged with separatism and deported to the west of the country. The military also introduced a law that changed the names of Kurdish villages into Turkish ones, leading to protests in many Kurdish provinces (Taspinar 2005). The politics of changing (read Turkifying) place names in the region would be repeated later on, in particular after the 1980 coup (see Öktem 2008, and Jongerden 2007). This pattern of a relaxation and loosening of

central control followed by reaction and a swift return to the repressive status quo was to be repeated.

Following the initiation of a new Constitution in 1961, the Justice Party (a reincarnation of the closed down Democrat Party) was voted into office and the landlords allowed to return. During this era civil society grew – meaning ordinary civil rights and liberties, like the freedom to express opinions and organize, and the consequent insinuation of this into governance, at all levels. Rural-to-urban migration also began to increase exponentially, along with the mechanization of farming in the countryside and the industrialization of production in the cities. It was within the labor movement in the cities especially that a new wave of Kurdist ideas and agitation developed (Grojean 2008: 74). In 1961, the country's first socialist party was founded, the Turkish Workers' Party, known by its acronym TIP, which attracted many Kurdish intellectuals who identified with the Turkish socialist intelligentsia. The leftist intellectuals in TIP saw the poverty of the Southeast as the result of the feudal structures and economic exploitation in the region, generally leaving the ethnic dimension of the problems there out of the picture (Taspinar 2005). However, it was within TIP that a young generation of Kurdish intellectuals acquired the various intellectual and ideological, organizational and networking resources and competences necessary to become militants (Grojean 2008: 75). At the end of the 1960s, local members of TIP organized a number of Kurdist meetings in important eastern cities, which would later become known as the Eastern Meetings (*Doğu Meetingleri*) (ibid: 76). The success of these meetings brought TIP to vote on and pass a resolution at its 4th Congress in 1970 recognizing the Kurds as a people in Turkey who were suffering from state repression (Grojean 2008 and Taspinar 2005). This resolution would be cited in the party's closure following the 1971 coup.

Kurdish politicians in the 1960s operated within the Turkish leftwing or rightwing political parties. Taspinar argues that the bipolar stasis of the Cold War during this period played a significant role in the development of Turkey's socio-political cleavages along ideological rather than ethnic or religious lines (Taspinar 2005: 91). The restrictions on journals advocating Kurdish cultural rights and leftist Kurdish movements remained, however, and ethnically conscious Kurdish intellectuals, students and workers in the urban centers would start to organize in underground political movements, working towards the ideal of self-determination (Taspinar 2005). Separately from the Turkish left, Barzani's Kurdish Democrat Party in Iraqi Kurdistan was an inspiration for Kurdish nationalist organization (Bozarslan 2008, Jongerden & Akkaya 2011). The failure of TIP to develop into a mass party led to splits and the establishment of Dev-Genç, the Turkish revolutionary youth, which gained popularity amongst Kurdish activists. Militants would also establish ethnic organizations such as the DDKO, the Revolutionary Cultural Hearths of the East. In 1971 though, the military intervened again, officially 'to end the anarchy' that arisen between leftist and rightist groups. Hundreds of parties and political groups, such as TIP and DDKO, were closed down and many activists arrested (Taspinar 2005).

Following the 1971 coup, Marxist groups resurfaced when they were offered a general amnesty in 1974 by the newly elected Republican People's Party. By this time, however, growing numbers of Kurds had become dissatisfied with the way the Turkish left had handled their cause, and the 1970s thus saw a multiplication of radical Kurdish leftist groups (Taspinar 2005). One of these groups emerged from the student environment in Ankara University and coalesced into what became the Kurdistan Revolutionaries, including Abdullah Öcalan. By 1978, the PKK was officially formed, with Öcalan as its leader and a Maoist methodology for a 'people's war' as its guide. This meant moving the base to the countryside, away from the centers of state power (for a detailed account see Jongerden & Akkaya 2011). By the time of the next military coup, in 1980, the PKK leadership had organized in neighboring Syria, and thus as an organization largely escaped intact through the period of mass arrests of political activists following the military's seizure of power. Nevertheless, a great number of PKK militants were picked up by security forces in Turkey, imprisoned and sentenced to death between 1980 and '83 (Grojean 2008).

At the end of 1982, the military regime bequeathed to the country a new constitution, which still stands today and continues to frame much of the current struggle. The 1982 constitution contained a number of specific provisions that increased the cultural and political repression in the southeastern provinces (Taspinar 2005: 96): the use of Kurdish in public was prohibited, a ban that last until lifted in 1991 by President Turgut Özal. And it became forbidden to establish a political party based on race, region, religion or social class (Grojean 2008). Political and military repression became widespread and commonplace during this period, not only affecting activists but also ordinary Kurdish citizens. Unsurprisingly, perhaps, this rebounded on the authorities, having the effect of boosting Kurdish nationalism and the leading to a rise in the popularity of the radical PKK (Taspinar 2005: 97, Bozarslan 2008, Romano 2006, İçduygu et al. 1999).

The 1980 coup also led to a great exit of leftist dissidents and Kurdish nationalists, mostly to Europe (Taspinar 2005: 98), including leading political figures like Kemal Burkay of the Socialist Party of Kurdistan, the PSK. This is thus the origin of the diasporic transnationalism that developed alongside events in Ankara and the Southeast. In Europe the fleeing Kurdish activists would find themselves in a political space contextualised by the European Community and Turkey's historic vision to Westernize ('modernize'). The Turkish right had already installed itself in this space since the late 1960s, and the Turkish left since the 1970s, and through a multitude of different organizations and associations and at multiple levels, from grassroots groups all the way up to formal state representations (Grojean 2008). The Kurdish nationalist movement was thus to develop itself transnationally in competition, cooperation and differentiation from these (ibid 2008).

Turkish nationals, including Kurds, had been moving to West Europe under 'guest worker' schemes and provisions since the beginning of the 1960s. The trickle became a

constant flow during the 1970s as the Turkish Diaspora in Europe was formed. Now, with the influx of Kurdish radicals, a proportion of these labor migrants, mostly young people, of course, looking to create a better life for themselves, were won over to the cause of creating a better life in their homeland. People across several different European countries were transformed from apolitical economic migrants to advocates for and members of a Kurdish nationalist movement (Van Bruinessen 2000, Grojean 2008). The continuing arrival of Kurdish political asylum-seekers during the eighties and following decades further increased their numbers and fanned the flames of Kurdish nationalist political activity in Europe. The PKK came to compete with the Socialist Party of Kurdistan (PSK), already present in Europe since 1979. By 1983 it had established eight associations in Germany, one in the Netherlands, Sweden, Switzerland and France (Grojean 2008). A division of labor would develop over time, with the PSK associations engaging primarily with the problems of Kurdish migrants in Europe, and the PKK with the developments at home (Grojean 2008).

Meanwhile, in 1984, the PKK had instigated a guerilla war against the Turkish state, which marked the beginning of the still unresolved armed conflict, now, therefore, in its twenty-seventh year (a resolution that is necessary, of course, like the Cyprus issue, if Turkey is ever to realise the dream of its Kemalist project and be truly accepted into the fold, as European). Initially, in the 1980s, the PKK sought idealistically to liberate the Kurdish territories from 'Turkish colonialism' and create a united, socialist Kurdistan (Jongerden & Akkaya 2011). An insurgency was instigated that sought to mobilize Kurds in the countryside, as well as attract support from Kurdish migrants and youth in the Turkish and Kurdish cities. The PKK organized attacks on local police forces and landlords cooperating with the capital, in order to expose the limits of state control over the Southeast (Taspinar 2005). In response to the PKK attacks and its growing influence in rural areas, the government introduced a village guard system through which it armed Kurdish clans (or families and individuals) loyal to the political centre, creating local militia to 'protect' the villages. From 1985 onwards, but in particular during the early nineties, a policy of village 'evacuation' and (environment) destruction was also employed, and a state of emergency (known by its acronym OHAL) was instigated from 1987 onwards.

Intended to choke the rural supply lines and restrict the movement of the PKK guerilla units, the evacuation of the countryside (never officially announced) – together with various strategic and operational military changes – was planned to enable the Turkish military to operate more successfully against the insurgency, to wage an asymmetric war – which up to that point the state had, in fact, been losing (Jongerden 2007). Hundreds of thousands of people were forced to leave their villages and hamlets and seek refuge in the region's cities, or go to the metropolises in the west of the country (or to Europe). The evacuees generally received little more than a bare minimum of notice to leave, with very few being awarded compensation for property, livelihoods, etc lost. According to the State of Emergency Regional Governorship, as of 1997, 905 villages and 2,523 hamlets were evacuated and 378,335 people migrated. National and international

NGO's, along with more recent semi-officially sanctioned research, put the number of internally displaced persons at between one to three or four million though (Tezcan & Koç 2006, Kurban et al. 2007: 83). It is probably that this evacuation played a major role in the state's reassertion of effective military control over the Southeast, but the cost was uncountable – not just in human misery, but also, through that, in further pushing the Kurdish public to support the PKK and providing another generation of dispossessed, radicalized youth.

In addition to the continuing flow of Kurdish nationalists to Europe from Turkey, a growing second generation there was also emerging, of politicized young Kurdish men and women who had grown up in the West (see in particular Grojean 2008, but also Lyon & Uçarer 2001). By the beginning in the eighties, but really developing in the 1990s, the Kurdish nationalist movement was able to use its position in Europe to engage in political lobbying for Kurdish rights and autonomy in Turkey, in individual countries and in the EU (Adamson & Demetriou 2007, Argun 2003, Adamson 2002).

During the beginning of the 1990s, with the Iraqi Kurdish refugee crisis at its border and under the more liberal premiership of Turgut Özal (see Gunter 2011 and Taspınar 2005), a number of opportunities arose in Turkey to address the Kurdish demands for more cultural rights. In certain circles, even the possibility of a future federation was being discussed. The problem was no longer merely regarded as security issue. Seven MPs – having been expelled from an existing social-democrat leftist party (the SHP) after they had attended an international conference on the Kurdish question (*Les Kurdes: droits de l'homme et identité culturelle*) organized in Paris by the Kurdish Institute in 1989 – formed the People's Work Party (HEP). Then, with the HEP going into an electoral alliance with the SHP to circumvent the 10% threshold, the first Kurdist (or pro-Kurdish) parliamentarians were voted to the Turkish General Assembly, in 1991.

The military wing of the National Security Council – a powerful executive, extra-governmental body established by the 1982 constitution – prevented this political progress from maturing, however. The generals believed that any compromise on the Kurdish issue prior to the surrender of the PKK would demoralize the army. They were also, and perhaps more importantly, opposed in principle to any recognition of the Kurdish problem as ethnically based, perceiving the granting of cultural rights to Turkey's Kurds as a first step on a slippery slope towards political rights, federation and ultimately statehood of the Kurds (Taspınar 2005). The political opening of that time was ended with the 1992 Newroz celebrations, an ancient ritual tradition marked in Turkey by its Kurdish population and now transformed into a nationalist statement. A total of 92 civilians lost their lives, shot by the security forces or crushed by tanks. Half of the HEP parliamentarians resigned and one year later their party was closed down because of alleged ties to the PKK – the first of five such closures to date of the Kurdish political party in Turkey.

The failed political opening coincided with the onset of the bloodiest phase of the conflict. The 1992-1995 period saw the number of deaths soaring to some 21,000, compared to around 4,000 for the period 1984-91. There now developed 'unruly pockets of authority' (Taspinar 2005: 106), with village guards engaged in local vendettas and mafia-like counter guerilla units operating with the support of the security forces engaged in regular extrajudicial killings. When Özal died (in April 1993) and Süleyman Demirel became president, the Kurdish issue became the exclusive domain of the military. Despite massive troop deployment in the region the PKK still imposed a de facto sovereignty in important towns such as Diyarbakir (Marcus 2007, Taspinar 2005).

Over the years the number of PKK related associations in Europe had grown hugely, enabling the PKK to mobilize thousands of Kurds to take the streets of European cities, at times of crucial events in Turkey. The growing visibility and popularity of the PKK inside Turkey by the beginning of the 1990s would also make the movement more attractive to young Kurdish Europeans to 'convert' and join its ranks (Grojean 2008). In several European countries, associations close to the PKK developed working relationships with anti-fascist and extreme leftist activist groups, which sometimes provided them with access to political parties on the left side of the political spectrum.

The internationalization of the Kurdish question in Europe arose mostly as a consequence of exposure of the flagrant human rights violations. Historically, there had been first the gas bombing of Halabja in Iraqi Kurdistan in 1988, and then the Kurdish refugee crisis following the 1990 Gulf War. The repression of Kurds in Turkey came to light in the beginning of the 1990s largely through the transnational activities of Kurdish activists. It was the handling of the insurgency by the Turkish state in particular that led the Kurdish issue in Turkey to become developed in the Western political arena more and more as a question of human rights (Grojean 2008: 182, and Chapter 4 here). The national politics of key migration countries for citizens of Turkish origin, such as Germany (see Østergaard-Nielsen 2003 and Grojean 2008), but also countries like Belgium, as explicated in Chapter 1, showed themselves open to addressing the Kurdish question. The European Parliament especially came to play an important role in the internationalization of the Kurdish question, explicated in Chapter 2.

However, it was during this period of entry into the corridors of European power that the movement came to the attention of the authorities in some host countries for civil disturbances and crimes related to their political and the PKK military activities. Proscription was on the way. In Turkey also, the military had managed to seriously weaken the PKK, by 1998 largely taking control of its rural power base. The Syrian government was put under pressure to expel Abdullah Öcalan, upon which Öcalan was forced into an odyssey in search of political asylum in Europe, only to find himself captured by the Turkish security forces in the Greek embassy in Kenya. Whereas no European political leaders had wanted to extradite the PKK leader to Turkey, there were no volunteers to grant him political asylum either. This absence of support would

seriously discourage PKK militants and sympathizers from belief in 'Europe' as guarantors of Kurdist demands, a disillusionment that would only grow when the PKK was designated a terrorist organization in 2002.

After Öcalan's capture the PKK leader re-envisioned the goals of the PKK and re-organized the party complex (see in particular Akkaya & Jongerden, 2011). He continued (and continues) to lead the PKK from his prison cell on an island in the Sea of Marmara, not far from Istanbul, from which he communicates through his lawyers and relatives. Today the PKK no longer advocates the establishment of an independent nation-state but seeks to establish local autonomy in the Kurdish regions (of the whole of Kurdistan) by means of bottom-up grassroots initiatives. This project was initiated in the municipalities where the Kurdish political party (then the Democratic Society Party, DTP) was in office, through the Kurdist civil society developed at that local level (Casier, Jongerden & Walker, forthcoming – here, Appendix 2, but also chapter 6). The Kurdish nationalist movement had in particular been able to grow its societal strength at the local level since the election of Kurdist mayors as of 1999 (see Watts 2006, but also Marcus 2007 and Romano 2006), and supported more recently since the general election of 2007 by representatives in Parliament again, this time circumventing the threshold by standing as independents.

This shift of approach by the Kurdish national movement to the civic sphere of politics – unconventional, rather innovative and certainly challenging, but politics in the classical sense nonetheless – has contributed to a huge relaxation of the atmosphere in the region. Together with political reforms instigated by a government with its eye on EU accession, the political space inside Turkey's Southeast has been transformed over recent years. Militarily the PKK officially operates now only in 'self-defense'. A unilateral cease-fire declared in 1999 held until 2004, since which further cease fires have been called off and on as a political tactic – e.g. related to the opening of covert negotiations – with occasional offensive actions by the PKK guerrilla (now based in Iraq), again as a political tactic (in order to demonstrate strength and increase bargaining power). Nevertheless, the action radius of the PKK has been confined, both nationally and internationally, since the PKK's designation as a 'terrorist organization' as of 2002 (Chapter 5).

Another significant development on the political front has been the rise to power of the AKP following its first election victory in 2002. Not only has this conservative yet progressive, moderately Islamic party changed the Turkish political landscape – as interested as Kurdish nationalists to diminish the entrenched power of the Kemalist elite and its profoundly undemocratic ideology – but it has also done this in part by securing electoral success in the Southeast. The Kurdish nationalists have faced a serious competitor for Kurdish votes in their 'own' region. The AKP government has sought to develop its own resolution of the Kurdish question, engaging with some of its cultural as well as economic dimensions, through an initiative termed the 'Kurdish Opening', later changed into a 'Democratic Opening' (discussed in Casier, Hilton &

Jongerden, 2010 – here, Appendix 2). The main problem here has been the continuous exclusion of the Kurdish nationalist movement from the debate, and the lack of opportunities to engage in political negotiation over a settlement of the armed conflict.

Advocates of the Kurdish nationalist movement in Europe have found themselves in a delicate, not to say difficult position of late. Nevertheless, activists have sought to affect the European agendas towards Turkey following the opening of the accession negotiations (see Chapters 2,3 and 5). It has been my observation, however, that Europe has tended to give way to Turkey during the 2000s as the place to undertake action, rather diminishing the importance of the Europe-based activities. Thus the possibility of a strategical shift in the Kurdish nationalist movements' diplomatic approach that relates to the local growth of the legal wing of the movement, as well as the changing ideological and organizational structure of the PKK itself (see Chapter 6).

Main findings of the research

Building on the literature and insights referred to, this research has sought to uncover *how* and *to what end* and *with how much success* transnational political activities have been and are being put into practice in the case studied, the Kurdish nationalist movement in Europe and Turkey. Attention has been devoted to the changing socio-political dynamics in the country of origin (Turkey), the political contexts of countries of settlement (in Western Europe), and the organizations and/or agents of transnational political activism themselves (especially, the PKK and related associations). Additionally, and maybe more importantly, attention has been devoted to other levels of political organization that proved important. In particular the research has shown how transnationalism can be characterized by multileveled network-building, from the local, municipal to the supranational level (in particular Chapter 3, but also Chapter 1).

Multilevel networks and the actors involved in them may operate across several state boundaries. Thus, as we will see, transnationalism studies might still be tending to fall into the trap of ‘methodological nationalism’ and ‘methodological territorialism’ (Brenner 2004), just because studies in transnationalism have too often remained confined to a binary approach, the study of the dynamics between two nation-states (the countries of origin and settlement), instead of being able to see how transnational political activists have come to open up a political space that is multileveled and (relatively) unbounded to any one national territory, or pair of territories. A good example here is the role of politicians (elected mayors) from the country of origin (Turkey, the Southeast) in the transnational political networks that stretch into the European political space, and the exchange more generally between a homeland political party (the Kurdish party in Turkey) and ‘diasporic’ organizations (e.g. the Kurdish Institute of Brussels) on the one hand, and national and international politicians (e.g. MEPs) on the other. Networks are constructed and maintained that make it possible to articulate issues at higher levels to mobilize leverage (Haarstad & Floysand 2007). By developing networks that articulate multiple sites and levels of political organization, motivated and motivating actors (like the activists for Kurdish nationalist movement) are able to circumvent the historically entrenched political hierarchies (Smith 1995). As Chapter 3 demonstrates, this ability to press claims at multiple levels of policy making enhances the effectiveness of an otherwise local opposition group, allowing the development of a ‘space of political engagement’ beyond the boundaries of the nation-state.

In the case studied, discursive strategies turned out to be crucial for the production of such a ‘space of political engagement’. Gaining access to politicians at different levels of policy-making has required deliberation over the discourses employed. The success of transnational political practices therefore depends very much upon the choice of what problems to present as rallying points, and paying close attention to how these

problems are framed. The symbols, narratives and metaphors used by advocates of a cause must resonate with those of the targeted actors (Hardy et al. 2000). Thus do activists engage with 'frame bridging' (Benford & Snow 2000). Particular attention is paid to 'framing' in Chapters 2 and 3 of this dissertation.

Whereas the research unravels the multileveled shapes transnationalism can take, it nevertheless, at the same time, testifies to the ongoing importance of how transnational political actors have to be 'grounded' in the specific national politics of the countries of settlement. Olesen had already argued that we need to see the transnational through both the local and the national, that local, national and transnational spaces are all implicated in today's social movement activism (Olesen 2005: 420). The study of the genealogy of political support in this dissertation has lent insight into how support at supranational levels (in this case, in particular the EU) has come into being, pointing out the importance of the (pre)existence of support at the national (here Belgian) and subnational (here Flanders) levels so as to provide not only access to centers of (higher level) political power, but also hospitable and fertile ground for transnational political activism in supranational institutions (Chapter 1, 2, 3 and 5).

A clear-cut division between political activism from the country of origin and in the country of settlement may also be problematic. This is found to be the case for Turkey's Kurdish nationalist movement, as, in particular with regards to the transnational political activism that is ideologically (and sometimes organizationally) steered by the PKK: the so-called 'homeland politics' of Kurds in Europe are largely initiatives and networks accommodating the oppositional politics of the PKK and its affiliated party in Turkey. Homeland politics by politically active Kurdish immigrants and refugees thus serve the oppositional political activism of the Kurdish nationalist movement in Turkey, raising questions about the degree to which Europe-based Kurdish activists, or 'the Diaspora' that is developing (as a consequence of social-political mobilization), are able to work autonomously from the PKK and develop a political agenda of their own (as is the case, for example, with the various Armenian 'Diasporas' – see Shain & Barth 2003). Such developments would be expected to impact upon the European Turkish Kurds in relation to Turkey (as country of origin) and the EU-member states (as countries of settlement), and also in relation to each other (insofar as, for example, they would develop separate identities).

How transnational political activists 'negotiate their ways in' (Østergaard-Nielsen 2003b) has been one of the main questions addressed throughout this PhD. Frame bridging, as mentioned above, has allowed networks of support to expand, and is part of 'negotiating ways in'. However, it is in particular by means of the study of what I've called the 'genealogy' of existing transnational advocacy networks (see in particular Chapter 1, but also 3) that we are able to understand the development of support within the country of settlement's political society, and the types of transnational political practices that are created and sustained by this. In particular, the focus here has been on the cooperation between a political movement that has a transnational outreach (the

PKK) and the organizations set-up by politically engaged Kurds residing in Europe and *their* relations to both governmental and non-governmental actors. The study has therefore distinguished itself from others in respect to the specific attention devoted to the role of 'political gatekeepers' (at 'the receiving end') in transnational political activism and their importance in accessing political sphere of the country of settlement, in order to (1) affect its foreign policy towards the activist's country of origin, as well as (2) take the issues to higher levels of policy making. In other words, the question of how political change back 'home' is being pursued through these multiple entries has been key. This represents a core concern of the first half (first three chapters) of this dissertation.

Particular attention has been paid to the question 'why' it is that politicians of the countries of settlement have been convinced to take up the role of political gatekeepers in the advocacy of what ultimately seems 'another man's cause'. The evidence from the (Belgian) case investigated here leads to the conclusion that ideological beliefs, embeddedness in a political party's tradition, and the very personal experience of or exposure to the (consequences of) political struggle are all factors indicative of politicians' political engagement with the demands of transnational political activists, and together may contribute to a long-term commitment.

The 'groundedness' of transnational political activism is also expressed in the importance of local developments for the initiation of new transnational political initiatives. An example of this is the organization of the first Social Forum in the Middle East, which was initiated by the DTP-led Municipality of Greater Diyarbakir (discussed in Chapter 6). This, however, also strongly relates to the changes within the Kurdish movement as a transnational political social movement (below).

While this research has lent insight into the conditionalities of transnational political activism in relation to the countries of settlement, inquiries into the main transnational political actors own organizational set-ups and ideological outlooks and their dynamics, in relation to both the changing homeland political situation and the international political context, have proven in this case to be indispensable in gaining an understanding of the directions transnational political activism takes, both in terms of the nature of activities, and the issues that are addressed and ways these are being framed. The follow-ups on the evolving situation in the country of origin and the transformation of the transnational political movement, which materialized as the (co-authored) background papers (Appendixes 1 and 2) allowed me to assess ideological and strategic changes in the transnational political activities of the movement under study (Kurdish nationalist movement). Chapter 6 is informative in this regard, in that it not only gives an in-depth account of new means to internationalize political causes, but relates these recent engagements back to the internal ideological and organizational change of the main transnational political actor, clearly demonstrating a shift within the Kurdish movement, away from the classical state or governmental actors oriented transnational advocacy work (as described in Chapters 1-3) and towards an increased

investment in the development of solidarity and strengthening of transnational networks with and between non-governmental actors.

On the basis of his study of Kurdish transnational activism in Europe, which focuses in particular on different kinds of political protest, Grojean has argued that Turkey serves as the 'structuration point' of Kurdish protest (2008), meaning that transnational political activities are initiated mainly in response to developments inside the country of origin, rather than in relation to the country of settlement.³ The exception to this Grojean showed being those instances where the transnational political activists find themselves in worsening relations with the authorities of the country of settlement, their room for manoeuvre being confined, a situation demanding specific initiatives to address these issues. Complementary to this research focusing on protest actions and repertoires, mine on 'diplomatic' or lobbying activities by transnational political activists affirms Grojean's findings. The issues addressed in the lobbying are indeed primarily informed by the transnational political activists' reading of current events in the country of origin – although often reframed into the language and sensibilities of the political institution being addressed (see in particular Chapter 2, but also 4). The confinement of the political manoeuvring space in Europe with the terrorist designation of the PKK, one of the main transnational political actors in the Kurdish case, has also led to a range of initiatives dealing with this (see Chapter 5), sometimes even at the cost of addressing the grievances of ordinary Kurdish citizens of which the transnational political movement considers itself to be the representative (below).

As much as the country of settlement has proven to be a structuration point for the transnational political activism in this case, I have thus found that Turkey's EU-accession process has also been of great influence, and that this is played out in different ways. In Chapter 3 especially, I have explained how the choice of topics addressed and their framing has been informed and shaped by the growing affinity of political activists with the European Union's institutional framework, programs and language. The most obvious generalized example here is the transnational agents' couching of their discourse in terms of 'human rights'. Other discursive terms, like 'crimes against humanity' or 'war crimes' (e.g. in respect of the village evacuation program) might be difficult to argue (implying legal difficulties), while something like 'moral wrongs' would be too subjective (without legal grounding), but, and more importantly I would argue, these terms are not embedded in the framework of the EU: 'human rights', by contrast, is explicitly named and emphasized in the Copenhagen Criteria for accession to membership.⁴ More specifically, the Kurdish nationalist movement's lobbying work is, as

³ In their research on the Alevi community in Germany, Schwalgin & Sökefeld have also found that the Alevi politics of identity in the Diaspora is inscribed into a transnational political field, given that it is always related to developments in Turkey. They draw particular attention to instances of violence inside Turkey that have had strong mobilizing effects in the Diaspora (Schwalgin & Sökefeld, 2000).

⁴ Indeed, this tendency is observed also internally in Turkey, with the AKP government now reframing the Kurdish issue in terms of 'democracy' (changing its 'Kurdish Opening' to a 'Democratic Opening'), another principle of the political Criteria.

explained in Chapter 1, broadly following the agenda of the accession negotiations with regards to the publications and debates over the yearly progress reports, and by means of events (such as conferences inside the European Parliament), that reflect the time framework of the negotiations. Here again, Grojean's findings are replicated, with lobbying by Kurdish activists defined by an EU structuration in addition to the Turkey structuration, these combining to a 'double structuration'. This combines, it might be suggested, with the forced structuration of problematic country of settlement relations to result in a 'triple structuration'. And this triple structuration essentially defines the rallying points of the transnational Kurdish nationalist movement's diplomatic initiatives.

This suggestion of a triple structuration is supported by a negative finding. My research has also shown that the transnational advocacy undertaken has become somewhat estranged from the lived realities of the people in Southeast Turkey that both activists and political representatives aim to represent. This has come about particularly because of the adaptation of the transnational political activities to the particular institutional context of the EU, but also, I would argue, as a function of the triple structuration. As a generalization, a movement's activities are obviously limited to the individual and organizational energies available. It cannot do everything, and in this case the three main structuring foci covering multiple physical locations are quite enough. More specifically, however, it is the very framing of the Kurdish issue in terms of human rights (Chapters 1, 2 and 4), which has led to a de-emphasis on problems of socio-economic disparity and neglect in the region. This finding would seem to constitute a substantive critique of the movement and its *modus operandi*.

The (negative) finding – and criticism – is not that the Kurdish nationalist movement has failed to address the ordinary needs of the ordinary people – that would be for its regional political rival the AKP to make (e.g. that the Kurdish party, now BDP, engages in symbolic politics at the expense of 'real issues', an argument that may or may not have merit) – and also for critical (Kurdish) voices of the movement in Europe (e.g. that the PKK focus on homeland politics leaves day-to-day minority concerns of Kurds in Europe unaddressed, again, a point that may or may not be well made). Rather, it is that the movement has 'missed a trick', but this 'trick' actually being something quite fundamental. By tailoring its discourse so closely to the EU agenda of human rights – in Diyarbakır and Ankara possibly, in Paris and Berlin probably, and in Brussels and Strasbourg certainly – the movement has neglected to argue sufficiently for (1) the ordinary concerns of people in the Southeast in putting its case in Europe, especially in the EU, in particular with regards to the suffering of internally displaced persons, and also the lack of viable economic prospects for the many Kurds living in the regions urban peripheries today as a result of the evacuation; (2) the political demands for some form of self-rule or local autonomy; and ultimately (3) the need for a genuine mediating role of the EU with regards to negotiations between the armed actors in the ongoing armed conflict. Whereas the latter has in recent years finally come to the table, in particular during the yearly EUTCC-conferences, it suffered neglect during the first years of the

accession negotiations, implicating Kurdish diplomats themselves in part for of the lack of understanding of the depth of Turkey's Kurdish issue amongst EU officials.

Another problem with framing the issues for an EU discourse is that it can go wrong – it can have consequences, that is, which are undesired and even harmful. The emphasis by the movement on human rights has been instrumental in reforms initiated by the Turkish government to fulfill the requirements for accession to the European Union. Yet these appear – as I argue in the analysis in Chapter 4 – to have had a contradictory outcome: instead of increasing the cooperation between civil society actors and the state for the promotion and protection human rights, the established human rights associations are facing newly established state-centric institutional bodies that challenge their assessments and undermine their claim to authority regarding the 'truth' about human rights in Turkey, especially with regards to the Kurdish question.

Furthermore, the institutionalization process has affected the balance of power between the established non-governmental human rights associations and the government-sponsored bodies in their relation to the European institutions. Two notes on this finding are appropriate. First, it exemplifies the observation made in the history (above) that the EU has tended more to support the Turkish state qua AKP government over the Kurdish movement in recent years (since the opening of the process towards accession negotiations, especially). Second, this is an outcome all the more striking, not to say ironic, given that it is exactly because of the decades long struggle by these very established human rights associations in advocating for human rights in Turkey and exposing the state's human rights violations both nationally and internationally, with support of the European-based Kurdish organizations and their contacts, which assured that human rights remained high on the EU-Turkey agenda in the first place (Chapters 2 and 4).

Finally, an important finding of this research is that there is pre-occupation in the transnational politics of Turkey's Kurds to enlarge, protect and strengthen the transnational political space in which the Kurdish Movement operates. This has become most visible in the continued negotiation over the terrorist designation of the PKK, that denies the party – and its affiliated organization and political representatives – political legitimacy and recognition as a partner in the political negotiations over the future make-up of Turkey and the place of its Kurdish constituents. From the perspective of those in the movement, the terrorist designation needs to be rescinded as it obstructs a negotiated solution to the armed conflict inside Turkey and provides the European Union with an excuse not to take up a clear mediating role (see Chapters 2 and 5). Therefore, my research has also enabled me to assess the likely success or failure of current Turkish government and state' bids to resolve (or dissolve) the issue (see Chapter 5 and Appendix 2).

Methodology and ethical questions

Here I will explain how the research was conducted, coupling the methods I have employed to my various concerns. I came to this research without a training in one single discipline (such as political sciences or international relations theory), but rather with a background in social work, moral philosophy and conflict studies. Finding my own way through different fields of knowledge production has thus led me on occasion across unstable ground, but perhaps this academic nomadism has had some advantages. Certainly it has caused me to think outside of boxes. Indeed this research has assumed an interdisciplinary approach from the onset, drawing from political theory, the sociology of migration and transnationalism, political sociology, geography, social movement theory and political anthropology.

The findings reported here are based significantly on qualitative research techniques, understanding these as “[...] *a form of social inquiry that focuses on the way people interpret and make sense of their experiences and the world in which they live*” (Holloway 1997: 2). By emphasizing this approach, the aim is to understand the social reality of individuals and groups; the behavior, perspectives and experiences of the people we study are therefore explored according to an interpretive approach to social reality. Qualitative research consists of a set of interpretive, material practices that make the world(s) of the subject(s) visible as a series of representations, including field notes, interviews, conversations, recordings and memos to the self. Therefore social ‘things’ are studied in their natural settings, attempting to make sense of, or interpret phenomena in terms of the meanings people give them (Denzin & Lincoln 2000: 3).

As we learned from Gadamer (1999), research is not an exercise in recording an objectively observable reality: understanding and interpreting is always constructive. This inevitably involves the concrete, historically situated personhood of the researcher, as we can only understand something from a point of view. Qualitative research in particular locates the observer in the world, crucially demanding a personal engagement. The interpreter cannot leave himself to one side, and a certain level of self-consciousness is thus a prerequisite, for all interpretation is ultimately a form of self-expression. In the words of the late French ethnologist Germaine Tillon: “*Nous n’avons l’accès que d’un être humain — nous-même — et il est impossible d’inventorier les autres, si ce n’est par rapport à cet inventaire premier que nous ne pouvons trouver qu’en nous. Si l’on ne se connaît pas soi-même, on ne connaîtra jamais personne. Et oserais-je dire qu’on ne se connaît qu’à l’usage ? Un usage de nous-même, il est vrai, qui remonte à notre naissance, et qui peut, à cause de cela, ressembler à l’intuition pour les êtres rares que chaque expérience instruit*” (Tillon 2009: 3). Of course, my own assumptions and prejudices have played out in the fieldwork and influenced the observations I have made, the questions I have asked and the directions the research has ultimately taken.

I have mainly drawn from (political) ethnography in the choice of my research approach and methods. In particular, I engaged with face-to-face, unstructured and semi-structured interviews, informal interviewing and (participant) observations in a variety of research settings. As an analytical technique, personal – participatory – observation can give important insight into ‘how’ and ‘what’ questions, and inform the study of subjects in their natural settings. It might also provide clues into what it actually is that people are doing, which might not always be the same as what they say they are doing. The observations being participatory means also that I myself took part in the meetings, conferences, etc in which I found myself, rather than merely observing and making little or no contact with the subjects of the investigation. A film documentary type fly-on-the-wall approach – in academic reportage, the would-be objectively detached recorder of a scene unfolding – is certainly not the only, and may not be the best approach to an epistemology of political ethnography.

Ethnographic knowledge production draws on theory to interpret phenomena as they are encountered. The ethnographical insights and material are the basis for constructing new theoretical insights (Cerwonka & Malkki 2007: 118). Participant observations allow one to reach knowledge that was not prefigured in one’s starting paradigm, it allows the researcher to be ‘surprised’ (Willis 2007: 174). Ethnographic knowledge is thus produced by throwing oneself into the equation, as it were, viscerally, emotionally, ‘getting involved’. Throughout the research I have indeed experienced many such ‘surprises’ – in particular when, through my observations and interviews, I encountered realities that were very different from the preconceived notions I brought with me constructed on the basis of earlier (theoretically-informed) knowledge. This was especially so with regards to the political role of human rights associations, rendering problematic divides between ‘state’ and ‘society’ previously assumed as clear-cut, and also to prefabricated categories like ‘diaspora’ and ‘diaspora politics’, which often just do not fit the observed realities. It is very likely that my previous schooling in social work and moral philosophy, very much a training in humanistic ideals and theoretical questions of how the world and people in it ought to behave, how things should be organized played a role here. Even though these assumptions about the way of the world might have hampered me initially in uncovering socio-political realities and in particular the roles of power structures and relations, it is at the same time most probably *because* of the strong contrasts between my initial assumptions and the observed realities that certain things have drawn my attention more strongly than would otherwise have been the case. In retrospect, therefore, my preconceptions have been equally a handicap and a blessing.

Besides the semi-structured and unstructured formal and informal interviews and the (participatory) observations, textual analysis of policy documents, party manifestos, parliamentary reports, and the like, have been an important source of information, to which the many references to policy documents throughout the different chapters will bear testimony.

The following sections explain in more detail how I went about doing the research in the field, as well as some of the different ethical questions my research brought up. Information is given into how the interviews and observations were conducted, and how different concerns directed the choices I made during the research process. I have divided this into sections addressing the issues of confidence building, dealing with distrust, violence, the question of the (political) engagement of the researcher and working in different research settings.

Gaining confidence

“[...] the ethnographer often becomes a chameleon and tries to be flexible, open-minded, nonjudgmental, accommodating, approachable, and, of course polite. This is not just an “act” or a “front”, and one (usually) tries to be all these things in any relationship” (Cerwonka & Malkki 2007: 94).

Gaining trust was not just a matter of having myself introduced into circles of people. I could not just step in and introduce myself, but had to be introduced by entrusted others. From the first stages of the research – actually before it started – I built up a relationship of trust with the director of the Kurdish Institute in Brussels, Derwich Ferho. With his longstanding contacts amongst Flemish politicians, Ferho was important as a key figure and bridge between Kurdish activists and national and international politics, specifically in Belgium and Turkey, but also more generally in the EU and the Kurdish regions in the Middle East. Not a militant of the PKK, and as I was later to learn, also often criticized within PKK circles, the director was not always the right person to connect me with other activists engaged in Kurdish diplomacy. Therefore I also developed contacts separate from the director, in particular with Fayık Yağızay, the European representative of the Kurdish DTP (BDP) and his Turkey-based colleagues. Besides these entrees, a former PKK-member (who cannot be named) was an important informant who introduced me to other personalities still active inside the organization or sympathetic and thus closely related to it. I was able to initiate my encounter with the Kurdish Southeast through a range of interesting contacts provided me in the run-up to my first trip to Turkey by Associate Professor Joost Jongerden, who had himself spent several years doing fieldwork in Diyarbakir. Upon each new encounter, either in Europe or Turkey, I would inquire for other people that might be interesting to talk to, which extended the list of potential interviewees. Furthermore, my interpreter in Turkey (see also below), who had worked for the municipality for several years, was vital in guaranteeing access to the field, by introducing me to various members of the political and civil society of Diyarbakir.

Dealing with distrust

A reoccurring concern, in particular at the beginning of my fieldwork based in Europe, was to overcome possible distrust from the research subjects towards my 'being there' and my questioning. Many questions that were on my mind I did not dare to raise in a direct manner, fearing that these moments of intense contact with my research subjects would be experienced as 'interrogations' and thus result in rejection, not just for ordinary human, emotional reasons, but also because of the security/political dimension involved. This concern related strongly to the prior knowledge I had about the secretiveness of the PKK and its forms of political organization, in both Europe and Turkey. Moreover, the fact that the PKK had been listed as a terrorist organization by the EU also implied that its leaders and militants were under the surveillance of state security agencies.

My first encounters with Kurdish activists reinforced the concern about distrust as they testified precisely to this sense of being 'watched' by both the Turkish and the Belgian 'state'. I recall, for example, the following experience, which exemplifies the distrust I encountered:

In the Winter of 2007 I paid my first visit to the building of the Kurdish National Congress to interview one of its leading members, Nizamettin Toğuç. Before the interview could start, some of the activists present insisted on showing me around the whole of the first and second floors of the building. Feeling I could not really refuse, I joined them but, to my surprise, found myself being given a tour around desolate offices, while my 'guide' proceeded to open up the cupboards. I could only assume he was intent on assuring me that they had nothing to hide. It became obvious that they were not used to visits from Flemish people (including research students) who were not after the kind of information the state security would be. Whether they had previously had many (or any) visits from the security forces – clandestine, as mine must have seemed, or otherwise – I preferred not to ask at the time, but the suspicion I met with on that occasion certainly was not the last time I encountered mistrust during the course of my research.

These concerns, and the felt need to build up some level of confidence, both in me as a researcher and in the sincerity of the project, affected the way I conducted interviews throughout the course of the research. In his account of his own experiences in the field, Grojean described this as "*se développer un système d'autocontraintes*" (Grojean 2009:5), which prevented him from, for example, daring to ask about the clandestine activities of the PKK or the real party positions of informants (in case they were militants and cadres). I never asked for this kind of information either. Instead I opted for a patient and cautious approach to my research subjects, particularly during the first encounters. This meant that I would in general introduce myself and my topic of interest, as well as the reason why I thought this encounter would be of interest to the research, and then wait to see if that person would commence to engage in a conversation, upon which I would pick up on what s/he said and enter my own questions. There was generally,

therefore, an improvised quality to these interviews, but that does not mean that they were entirely formless or each one entirely unique and original.

Often the conversation would start with my presenting a very open-ended question to the person, something that would allow him/her just to start talking. At the beginning of an interview I did indeed have a prepared list of questions, some general and some specific, but I seldom let the interview be lead by it. The question list functioned as a personal check list, but seldom structured the interview itself in a straight-forward way, even though the choice of topics I would pick up on more in detail would tend to be determined, at least in part, by the previously prepared questions. Working this way allowed the interviewees to feel more comfortable, as they were the ones choosing what to talk about and what to remain silent about, and could think of themselves as 'leading' the conversation, rather than vice versa. More importantly maybe, it allowed me to learn to continuously stay 'open' for new kinds of views and information that I had not necessarily thought of before, nor even considered their importance, perhaps. Indeed, it has been argued that conducting interviews with (political) elites by means of open-ended questions allows a greater opportunity for respondents to organize their answers within their own frameworks and guarantees greater receptiveness towards the interviewer (Aberbach & Rockman 2002).

In a way I led the interviewees introduce me into their worlds, without forcing myself into them. Off course this meant that I was also, in the beginning, hearing many of the same criticisms voiced, histories of past suffering and victimization again retold. In that sense the interviews could be frustrating, as not every encounter was necessarily very fruitful in obtaining the kind of information I was in search off. This was also a learning process for me. The more that I learned about the political history of the Kurds in Turkey, followed the current developments in the homeland, and became familiar with the literature, the more I found myself able, particularly during later encounters with the same persons, to overcome generalities and repetition and engage with reflections of more concrete developments. I was no longer a layperson, which also implied that I was to be taken more seriously, as ultimately did happen.

I refrained from recording interviews with Kurdish activists, both in Europe and Turkey, out of the double concern that I would unnecessarily frighten the research subjects, and thus find them censuring themselves, and also that the collected data might – if seized – be misused against my informants. During and following each interview, I would take extensive notes by hand, and type out and complete them later. The exception to this were the interviews with Flemish politicians who had been engaged with the Kurdish issue, for whom anonymity and security was not an issue. The majority of the interviews with this group were recorded and then fully transcribed. In case of security concerns I kept my informants anonymous, but I refrained from keeping sources anonymous when quoting from speeches, conference panels, press conferences, etc, given the already public nature of these events.

Faced with violence

The violent dimension of the Kurdistan Workers' Party, in particular during the first two decades of its existence, was an aspect that I myself struggled with. On a personal level I am deeply uneasy with any role for violence in political struggles generally – including those of 'freedom fighters' – and especially when civilians are targeted, as undoubtedly has been the case with the PKK (and I was confronted with this moral dilemma regardless of any actions of the state). I was especially appalled, however, when I read about internal executions of leaders and militants, both in the Middle East and Europe, and learned more about the party discipline in general. It seemed to me that for those who were fighting a revolution, individuals' lives came cheap and that those in charge were often there at the cost of others. Reading both academic (Grojean 2008) and non-academic work (Mater 1999, Marcus 2007) which revealed the bloodiness of the conflict reminded me time and again that the people I was chatting with over tea were often part of this very organization, had dedicated their lives to it and were still observing its rules. The party hierarchy, Öcalan's dictatorial position, the violence in its various forms these always kept me uncomfortable, restless – and yet at the same time intrigued me. Instead of condemning these aspects of the lives of my research subjects, I tried to understand them, in spite of my initial aversion. Violence was used as a tool to communicate messages, to regulate behavior, to install fear, in the party's own militants, as well as in the targeted society (or rather societies, i.e. including Kurdish elites and recalcitrant Kurdish communities along with the state and its representatives). It was not violence for the sake of violence, but one with its own rationality, its own logic of necessity.

Cerwonka and Malkki have argued, following Du Bois, that if ethnography is an attempt to understand, it must involve trying to understand not only the things and people one admires but also those one does not. The more one understands, the harder it is to construct a one-sided account of people as 'good guys' and 'bad guys' (Cerwonka & Malkki 2007: 132). This works against the very othering that we analyze in sociological theorizing but so easily leave untouched at a personal level, the othering in which we ourselves inevitably partake, as academics and as people, and certainly which people in positions of socio-political power and responsibility do in their daily course of making normative decisions. Violence, in fact, is an example par excellence of the way in which a cultural taboo is linked in a Foucauldian and post-Foucauldian sense to operations of power. Not only is there a tendency to decry the violence of an outlawed (anti-hegemonic) group like the PKK, while neglecting to consider the other side of the equation, that of state violence, but there is also a blind spot when it comes to trying to understand why the marginalized and oppressed will opt to employ violence in the first place, a lack of appreciation of the question even of how they might relate to violence, of what meaning it may have for them. Such matters are not unimportant in our investigations, and certainly ought not to be assumed a priori in terms of moral absolutes defining what is and what is not negotiable.

One of the questions that has troubled many in Europe, for example, is that of why the PKK has maintained its armed forces in the mountainous borderlands, even though the situation on the ground has relaxed so much since the beginning of the 2000s. Of little concern to those who would easily tar the PKK with the indiscriminating brush of terrorism, this is an issue that has most deeply concerned those who would lend an ear to their cause, like the many European politicians that Kurdish activists have met with over recent years. An armed insurrection may perhaps have been defensible in the past, but such a military approach seems entirely inappropriate and quite disproportionate to the actual problems of Kurds in Turkey today. This question was equally troubling me at the outset of the research. It was only gradually that I came to understand the many conditions needed for those ‘up hill’ (the fighters in the mountains) to develop trust and a positive mindset in order to join those ‘down hill’ (the militants and sympathizers in the cities) and lay down their weapons and seek integration. Insight into the profound distrust amongst PKK militants in relation to the Turkish state also grew with the accidental encounters I had in which militants entrusted me with parts of their life-stories. These revealed how personal the armed conflict could become, and beyond the individual even, into generational and inherited levels. My awareness of the violence that sympathizers and militants of the Kurdish movement and their families and friends had themselves faced, both personal and structural, grew through the research. I recall one here, by way of example:

“What I am doing? Well, you could say I am a city guerilla!,” X chuckled. ‘I am legal now, since I left prison one year and a half ago’ (meaning that he was no longer armed, but active in political education in the cities). A couple of days later I asked him why he had chosen to become involved in ‘the movement’. It was a logical choice for him, as he explained to me. In the 1970s his brothers had all joined Turkish leftist revolutionary groups active in Tunceli/Dersim-region, where he had grown up. One of them was killed, another imprisoned for 26 years. These groups did not manage to grow in strength, and then the PKK arose as the alternative. He was one out of nine children, and his parents in turn had been the only two members of their family to survive the massacres in Tunceli/Dersim in the 1930s, when a Kurdish uprising had brutally been repressed. Still children at the time, they were found underneath the dead bodies of their relatives. I could not help but think of how the history of repression kept haunting Turkey’s present.

In actual fact, however, the political history and thus logic behind the violence is rather more complicated than this. First, it is highly likely that actually the state provoked the local clans into a violent but essentially defensive response (as a pretext to move in and finally annex for the new republic what had always been, even in Imperial times, a particularly unruly – independent – province). And equally, the fit of this ‘uprising’ into a roll call of Kurdish rebellions – whereby the PKK’s was the twenty-ninth (Jongerden 2007: 25, citing Kahraman 2003) – and its concomitant assignment of a simple Kurdish ethnicity to Tunceli/Dersim misrepresents the complex mix of identities of the local peoples, which are better specified as Alevi and Zaza (recent elections, for example, confirm the current province of Tunceli as outside the Kurdish region of the Southeast). In other words, even in this case (of X and his family), the awful, tragic human repetition

of history's violence was at the same time the social expression of its reflected representations. Just as I regarded it necessary not to pre-judge matters of violence as reported by the media or described in more academic works (regardless of which side in the conflict was supposed to have done the deeds, some of which were truly horrific), I continually found it necessary in the course of my research also not to make reflexive response to personal accounts of physical violence (both first hand and second hand) – and of their often violent emotions – in order to participate more honestly, from my own position, and observe, I hope, more acutely. At the same time however, I did find myself increasingly empathic with my subjects, as a natural human response to their shared histories of pain and wrongs still suffered (the violence of the state), and which did also appear to me to be warranted (objectively, these were justified grievances). This introduces issues around engagement.

The question of engagement

One of the difficulties I faced in Europe was the rise of expectations the research subjects invested in me. Without ever having promised anything to any one of the research subjects, the people I met regularly started to develop expectations with regards to my position as an academic and thus thought to be able to speak intelligibly as an 'expert on Kurds'. Because of my interest in their 'struggle' I was considered pro-Kurdish, without ever speaking out in favor of one or the other side of the conflict. I was implicitly linked to the power structures of effective communication; their cause was so manifestly, indisputably a just one; hence the obvious conclusion that I should somehow advocate or facilitate for them. And indeed, I did sympathize with their history and present situation from a basic human rights perspective.

Suggestions to organize 'something' at the university were bound to come. Some contacts suggested they could come and lecture during our classes, while others proposed to organize a conference. I managed not to accede to these suggestions without appearing to reject the people themselves or the cause they embodied. Quite how high expectations had risen became clear to me, however, in early March 2010. Some 25 Kurdish-linked locations in Belgium were raided by the police (including the satellite broadcasting station Roj TV), and Kurdish activists arrested (including two ex-MPs), suspected of involvement with the PKK and various drugs, etc. related crimes organized to fund the organization's activities (these raids broadly coinciding with similar raids elsewhere in Europe, and with heavily criticized raids on supposed PKK affiliates in Turkey which netted several top Kurdish politicians). At the time of the arrests and their coverage in the Flemish media, I did not publicly express any opinions, through writing or interview. For various reasons, I was reluctant to commit my thoughts to the public sphere at that time – and thus refused to denounce (or support) the actions undertaken. My inaction was reproached by some of the leading PKK

diplomats in Brussels about two weeks after the arrests, when they called me to ask 'Where I had been'.

The phone call stunned me. It felt as if they were treating me as one of them and thus disloyal to their organization and their cause. This was all the more so as my absence in the series of events had been a conscious one: several Flemish broadcasting stations and radio journalists had contacted me in order to talk to me, as an 'expert' about the accusations. Was it indeed true that the people arrested were members of the PKK? Was Roj TV to be considered the broadcasting arm of this organization? Insisting that they wanted a real interview, and with me being one of the few academics doing research on the PKK in Belgium, they thus confronted me with a crisis of conscience and forced me into action – even if it was the mental action of a decision to do nothing, which I in fact took.

The reasoning behind my decision went to the heart of my personal investment in the project and its involvement in its subject. To begin with, I did not want to hold up lies in public. Of course I knew about the nature of these associations and their relations that many associations, including Roj TV, were satellite organizations of the PKK, even though this was always officially denied. To have denied these relationships would have meant stepping out of my academic position and into that of an activist, lying for the sake of the greater cause. On the other hand, to have affirmed the relationships would have meant contributing to the further criminalization of the Kurdish movement in Europe, narrowing it down even more to 'a terrorist organization', a definition the practical usefulness and theoretical justice of which I had become very, and increasingly skeptical about.

Of course I could have testified to the relationships, while arguing against the PKK's designation. However, I doubted that much media time would be left to communicate any semblance of a nuanced picture of the whole conflict and the Kurdish movement, as surely an elaboration as to why the PKK was not necessarily well defined as a terrorist organization would require. This would take at least half an hour instead of the soundbite or two I would eventually be afforded on this. My participation in a serious, lengthy media discussion was one thing, but making a contribution to popular culture, as this would inevitably become, was something rather different. I was of interest for what I had to offer, my knowledge of the subject, but it was precisely this, and with it my academic integrity, that would be lost.

There were also personal considerations, which were no less problematic. On the one hand, any implicit incrimination of the PKK on my part would have quite likely led my contacts to withdraw and stymie my further investigations, while, on the other, any suggested support of the illegal, deemed terrorist organization could have had serious repercussions for me in terms of the authorities. Either way, any participation in interviews on my part would have risked compromising my research. My commitment to this was evidently greater than that to any felt cause, especially given my ambivalent position regarding PKK violence – but the commitment that I had come to feel through

my engagement was also best served, I felt, precisely through my research project, and, in other words, by my seeking to maintain my personal integrity in this matter. It is, of course, beyond the scope of this introduction to consider such matters as the general relationship of academic work to the world at large, but one may hope that there are many ways, including the small and unknown, in which society can be influenced and affected by research.

In Turkey the expectations of me that developed were different. In particular in Diyarbakır, where human rights activists and political activists working in different non-governmental organizations had previously only met Europeans visiting in political delegations or as representatives of the EU, I often felt treated as someone representing 'Europe', whatever that might be (a wide and variable cultural complex, but certainly including – images and critiques of – the West, economic power, political leadership, developmental advancement, etc). 'You should tell the Europeans that...' , 'You in Europe have betrayed us...' , 'It is the responsibility of the Europeans to do something about this conflict, as they have sponsored Turkey with arms and trade for all these years...' , were messages I frequently encountered during my initial field work in the Kurdish Southeast. Somehow research subjects would regard me as someone in the position of 'messenger' to that 'Europe' out there. Upon my return for a second period of field work six months after the initial one, some of these people would literally inquire after 'what I had done', back home. This led to feelings of embarrassment on my part. I had not made any promises of this sort, however, but just listening, showing interest and concern about their experiences and points of view were obviously enough in themselves to create such expectations. It confronted me with the fact that I was 'extracting' information and using their time, without being able to do much in return. My relationship with my research subjects was one of inequality, in which I made use of their willingness to talk and share but offered little in return – certainly nothing tangible – in the way of delivering upon the frustrations and demands they expressed.

Instead of directly engaging with the different requests and expectations, therefore, I tried to organize and act as an engaged and critical academic in my own right and in my own name, to voice things that would have otherwise have remained unheard, both nationally and internationally. In that way I felt able to give something back and thus restore a sense of equal exchange, which was important for me as a matter of conscience, but without feeling like I was being used by activists for their own ends. To this end I wrote a number of informative articles on the Kurdish issue in Turkey for a Belgian magazine and published several opinion articles in Flemish and Dutch qualitative newspapers, and in English on reputable websites (together with Joost Jongerden). Additionally, the two policy-oriented articles that are included as background papers (see appendixes) were co-written out of a concern with the current developments inside Turkey, addressing in particular the need to engage with negotiations with the Kurdish movement in order to settle both the issue and the conflict peacefully. Some of these initiatives did not go unnoticed by the activist community itself, as one of the opinion articles was translated into Turkish and Kurdish

and published in several Kurdish newspapers, later to be discussed on the Kurdish satellite Roj TV. Finally I tried to 'repay' the time and assistance I had received from the Kurdish Institute by engaging in a Dutch publication on the voluntarism of Flemish politicians for the Kurdish cause (which I was able to base upon data collected for this dissertation and use to create opportunities for fresh data collection that would serve both the book project and the articles I was working on).

'Do no harm'

Throughout my research it has been a concern that my research might reveal networks, tactics and strategies of various political actors that have generally remained hidden from or ambiguous for the outside world. Would uncovering what happens behind the scenes of Kurdish political activism weaken the efforts of the activists to bring about change? Could my research endanger those who already find themselves in a compromised position, both in Europe and at home? This concern was particularly present at the start of my research, as the activists themselves took great pains not to reveal their own affiliations openly either to me or to other counterparts in the conversations (during interviews or observations, that is). The fact that the PKK was designated a terrorist organization compelled many activists to conceal their true political colors from anyone outside of the movement. In my first writings, therefore, I consciously avoided any engagement with the Kurdish activists' and politicians' relations to the PKK. Later on, appreciating more and more the monopoly of the PKK in the transnational political space of the Kurds, and assured by the work of other researchers (such as Grojean, Romano and Marcus), as well as comforted by my promoter that I was not going to reveal anything state security forces would not already know, I did start to address this relationship in my writings. Nevertheless, I remained careful not to endanger research subjects, by protecting their names and keeping my sources anonymous when appropriate.

The second half of my four years of research coincided with a change inside the Kurdish movement, which also allowed me to more openly address the relationship between the different parts of the movement, including the PKK, in Turkey especially. The Kurdish party DTP (later BDP), more openly declared its support for and attested to its organic relationship with the PKK, partly in order to reject criticisms of its distancing itself from the 'terrorists'. The political party began to feel strong enough to do this, at least in a limited way, as it became more confident in and emboldened by its now established political position in the Southeast (represented in the national parliament after mid-2007, the DTP/BDP was increasingly in control of the local authorities and taking bolder decisions, especially in respect of symbolic politics i.e. expressions of Kurdish identity in the public domain). In concert with this, the lines between the PKK and civil society were becoming ever more blurred, since it was understood that activists in the movement who would once have joined the guerilla in the mountains could now be just

as, or more effective by staying in the cities (as in the case of X, above). The intertwining of the PKK and Kurdish civil society became something of an open secret. As it had become a policy to no longer hide or conceal the existence of the PKK in Kurdish civil and political society, I was reassured that I could myself more openly address this in my writings and presentations.

The 'do no harm' question remained prominent though in relation to my research and writings on the human rights' associations in Turkey. The inquiries I made for this (sub)study confronted me with the issue of political instrumentalization, or, the politicization of civil society organizations in Turkey, insofar as I was concerned not to aggravate their already existing legitimacy problems inside the country and in relation to European institutions. In the context of human rights and the development of democracy in the history in the country generally, this politicization is profound anyway, extending, for example, professional associations (i.e. not limited just to workers' unions). In the context of human rights, the Southeast and recent developments in and of Kurdish civil society in particular, it is striking, and thus perceived as such. Assessments by the Diyarbakır Bar Association, for example, can easily be written off by the Turkish establishment mainstream as Kurdish (implied, PKK) propaganda. The issue of politicization could not remain unaddressed in the article on the state-association interactions in and outside of the Southeast, but it seemed to me also that this could be considered as a positive affirmation of what these organizations were being reproached for by their opponents and detractors at home and in the EU. Of course I did not want to contribute in any way to the process of marginalization of the established human rights' associations that I was discussing. After all, even though these associations might be the subject of political instrumentalization, the complaints filed by citizens were real and did concern actual (claimed) violations of their personal (and/or collective) rights. The more I learned about the complexity of relationships between state and society in Turkey though, and the particularities of the Southeastern-based organizations, the more was I confronted with my own naïveté in thinking that in the years during and after armed conflict, societal actors could somehow have managed to remain politically neutral, even if they had wanted so. Open to the demands of the Kurdish movement, organizations were deemed 'PKK'. Contrarily, those that had tried to remain distant from the Kurdish movement's influence were instead suspect of being 'statist' or close to the 'Islamists' (as a political movement, led and represented by the ruling AKP). Furthermore, I learned to understand that in this (and other) conflict(s), both national and international discussion and advocacy around 'human rights' can become important political instruments – used and misused, misunderstood or manipulated – for the different actors involved.

Observations and interviews in different research settings

I undertook field research in Europe and Turkey. Interviews and observations were conducted in Brussels, Strasbourg and London, and in Istanbul, Ankara and Diyarbakir, mostly concentrated in the period between the spring of 2007 and autumn 2009. I thus moved in between different sites of activism and thus also different research settings, which warrants more reflection.

Brussels - Strasbourg

In Brussels and Strasbourg, the European Institutions (in particular the European Parliament and the Council of Europe) were the main research settings. It has already been pointed out that if one dives into the many articles and books published on Turkey's European integration one encounters 'institution building talk' (Firat 2009: 5), which primarily discusses what it is that needs to be done in order for Turkey to meet certain benchmarks (now, the 'Copenhagen criteria'). These kind of analyses are indeed 'body-less, faceless and agent-less' (Firat 2009: 5), and do not teach us anything about the agents of the integration process and how they go about doing what they do. In other words, the sociological and interactive aspect of the accession negotiation process has long been neglected in studies on the EU enlargement (Visier 2009), something that this research, I hope, has been able to overcome. Theoretical analyses of EU enlargement have also, moreover, neglected the impact of the enlargement process on changes in identities, interests and behavior of political and social actors, as well as the interactions and mutual influences between Europe and the candidate countries, both at the European level and at home, within the candidate countries (Visier 2009). Consequently, relations between Turkey and the European community have too often been conceived as the (single) product of an international context rather than the (multi-faceted) outcome of these increased transnational interactions. Finally, it has been argued that many studies of EU enlargement have remained highly state-centered, instead of analyzing the impact of the EU as a process that brings into play different social actors that express the European issue in their own ways and according to their own potentials (ibid. 2009).

Just as Turkish think tanks, bureaucrats and entrepreneurs are agents in Turkey's process of European integration, so are Kurdish activists also involved in the negotiation of Turkey's future and comprise part of the lobbying presence in the European capital. It was in the European Institutions that I attended conferences, press conferences and (informal) meetings between Kurdish activists and European politicians. Besides the EU institutions, Brussels was host to a number of important Kurdish organizations and other initiatives, such as conferences in the House of Parliamentarians of the Belgian Senate. In these places, I entered the world of advocacy and diplomacy. Formal attire and a demeanor to match were requisite; entry was by prior registration only, recognized by a badge of conditional acceptance. Eager to share their concerns and to

show that they were not the proclaimed 'terrorists', my research subjects would arrange my entrance and, over time, started to invite me to the events they organized.

The participatory observations I conducted inside the EU institutions, by joining meetings and conferences, were of great value to my research. The observations lent insight into matters that were less easily identified and illuminated by means of interviews, or which were just too obvious for the research subjects to think worth mentioning. In particular, they afforded insight into the networks that existed among activists of different (but sometimes related) organizations, and between activists and politicians (and their assistants), along with the nature of their communications and the topics that were being discussed, and how these were narrated by the activists themselves and received by the politicians involved. This in turn allowed me to understand how certain issues become successfully advocated, and to what extent this demands the right framing (see in particular Chapter 2, but also 4). The observations also gave me a better understanding of the positioning of the Kurdish movement vis-à-vis the EU and Turkey's accession bid, especially in relation to the PKK's terrorist designation (Chapter 5). Seeing Kurdish activists 'in action' concretized their agency most straight-forwardly, and rendered visible the work done behind the scenes of the faceless structures of the European Union. Another advantage of the participatory observations was that they allowed me to become a familiar face myself amongst the activist community. Consequently I was no longer solely observing the networks, but also introduced into these networks by activists whose trust I had won.

Turkey

Conducting research inside Turkey differed from doing research in Europe. At the outset, my encounters with European-based Kurdish activists, often people who had fled Turkey after the coup of 1980 or the war years that followed, had installed in me fear and suspicion about Turkey. Stories about secret police following every foreigner in Diyarbakır from dawn till dusk were commonplace. It was thus with a sense of great uneasiness that I arrived and spend the first days in this metropolis of Kurdish activism, my notebook stuck to my body, in case anyone might take it and uncover whom I had spoken to, what they had said and what the ultimate purpose of my being there really was. Indeed, having entered the country as a tourist (i.e. without a research permit), I knew that there really was reason enough for me to be put straight back on an airplane to where I had come from. It was only after a couple of week's intensively interviewing people and visiting local NGOs and politicians – without anything out of the ordinary happening – that I became more confident in this research setting. Moreover, I could comfort myself with the fact that I was only encountering people working legally in the Kurdish activist scene, either as journalists, NGO workers, policy advisors or elected politicians (even if, as was sometimes the case, they were at the same time fulltime militants of the PKK). I realized that the picture my European Kurdish contacts had

drawn of Turkey's Kurdish inhabited Southeastern provinces was one frozen in time from a far worse past than the current reality I was now encountering.

Doing interviews in Istanbul and Ankara was different again. The atmosphere in these metropolises in the West of Turkey was freer and, unlike Diyarbakır, I was easily swallowed up in the crowds of the big roads and pedestrian zones of the city. In Diyarbakır I always felt a foreigner, an outsider and often I was indeed the sole foreigner around. Besides, there was no greater contrast than, on the one hand, dining with one of Turkey's engaged intellectuals in one of Istanbul's finest fish restaurants overlooking the Bosphorus and the Golden Horn, and, on the other, sitting with human rights volunteers in the eight square meter kitchen of the refugee organization's humble office, sharing their rice and chicken.

An important difference between interviewing in Europe and Turkey was that of language. Whereas in Europe I could work with Dutch, French or English, without need of an interpreter, in Turkey I depended greatly upon an interpreter to translate between Turkish or Kurdish and English, because about two thirds of the interviewees were not sufficiently familiar with the languages I knew. Without doubt, I lost important information in the transition from one language into another, facilitated by a third person who would add another layer of (conscious and unconscious) filtering, neglecting to translate certain kinds of information, for example, as 'unimportant'. My interpreter had worked for the municipality of Diyarbakır, where he translated for Kurdish politicians and activists whenever foreign delegations and representatives came to visit. Because of his previous work experience he was a known figure amongst the people that were of interest to my research, and acquainted with the local issues. By learning Turkish during the course of the research, I was able myself to gradually improve my understanding of what was being said, so as to check if my questions were being accurately translated from English into Turkish, for instance, in order to make sure that I was not misunderstood. (In acknowledgement of my translator's work, I should say here that I could rarely find any fault with his translations, from what I could tell.) Acquiring a basic working knowledge of the language also allowed me to introduce myself and to engage with the accepted codes of politeness (and small talk), always welcomed as a sign of respect on their behalf and helpful in winning their acceptance of me as a person, from which acceptance of my work was more likely to follow. I grasped the importance of other, non-linguistic cultural sensitivities throughout the fieldwork: an invitation for lunch was not to be dismissed, guests are never allowed to pay, hierarchy and status in an organization were important to how a person should be addressed (thus respect for formalities), conservative Islamic men might not want to shake a woman's hand...

A change in access to the field both in Diyarbakır and Ankara occurred when I started to stay at former activists' houses. Living with people who were to become close friends enabled me to understand much better the day-to-day lived realities of war and political repression, and the scars it leaves on people's lives. It made me realize how the political becomes very much embodied, and literally, through imprisonment and torture. These

stays also provided me with hours of long informal conversations about political life in Turkey, the conflict and the particularities of the Southeast, not only with my new friends themselves but also, in turn, with their relatives and friends who shared their personal stories and political views. It increased my understanding of the many unaddressed grievances that have resulted from the conflict, as well as from the 1980 coup and the political regime that followed.

Conducting fieldwork in Turkey alongside that in Europe was of great value to my research. In particular it allowed me to see for myself the developments in the conflict-affected region of the country, to learn about the concerns of local activists and politicians, and to start to assess the relations between the southeastern-based associations and political representatives on the one hand, and the central government on the other. This in turn allowed me to better understand the kind of lobbying activities that were being developed in Europe. Most importantly though, it enabled me to understand how the PKK had become engrained and institutionalized, both in the political and civil society of Diyarbakır city and inside several nationally organized NGOs (see, for example, in Chapter 4, but also 6). This increased my understanding of what is currently at stake in the Kurdish issue and the shortfalls of the EU politicians' and bureaucrats' approach towards it. The fieldwork in Turkey allowed me also to engage with an analysis of the political and social developments on the Kurdish issue inside Turkey and in relation to the EU (see the background papers and particularly Chapter 5).

Partial knowledge

The knowledge one obtains by researching a certain phenomena is always partial (Cerwonka & Malkki 2007). I learned this for myself during the course of my research, when I saw myself confronted with the need to make choices and confine the subjects and phenomena studied. A good example of this was the idea I had of studying networks between cities. Initially I thought it useful to uncover all the different networks between individuals and organizations active in various cities that serve as nodal points in the Kurdish transnational political space, connecting Brussels, Köln, Strasbourg, and Istanbul, Ankara and Diyarbakır. I imagined myself being – at one point – able to map the different and overlapping transnational networks of exchange and cooperation. During the research, however, I started wondering about the sense of such an exercise. For one thing, my research subjects were not 'stuck' in these places. On the contrary, militants of the PKK active in diplomacy especially were moving around all the time, between different European cities, in Belgium, Germany and France, and also in the Netherlands, Spain and Great Britain. Although limited in numbers, this particular group of individuals was fairly mobile, rendering the cities where they operated of relatively little importance in their activities. Furthermore I learned that there were also ways for political activists to move back and forth between Europe and the Middle East, as some of the younger activists involved in diplomacy were sometimes called back from their

positions and sent to the PKK bases in Iraqi Kurdistan for ideological training. I was also very struck by the high mobility of elected representatives of the Kurdish party DTP/BDP, who moved back and forth between different cities inside Turkey and different cities in the European Kurdish political space that had developed over the last three decades. And all this without even broaching issues of virtual space in the new century of Internet-based communication. Place ran a distant second to the actions themselves, and so I elected to follow up on certain diplomatic activities and how these were initiated and developed, rather than engaging in a geographical exercise covering the entire diplomatic radar of the Kurdish movement.

Questions of internal and external validity

Qualitative research is prone to criticisms. In particular, the internal validity and external validity or 'generalizability' of the research findings are questions of concern, and this in particular for social and political researchers not acquainted with qualitative research methods like. The question of internal validity is addressed through the use of multiple methods (in concreto interviews, observations, document analysis), also known as 'methodological triangulation' (Denzin & Lincoln 2000). The use of multiple methods has not only helped me to work towards a more in-depth understanding of the phenomena studied, but also to decrease the deficiencies and biases that stem from single methods (Mitchell 1986) and thereby secure a higher level of internal validity. Internal validity was also secured by peer feedback on my data and findings, and through the extended time period of data collection, which in itself further assisted my appreciation of the subject (Merriam 1995).

As is clear from the different chapters, this dissertation is very much a collection of different inquiries into particular aspects of the Kurdish transnational political practices. Most of these sub-inquiries are case-studies that inform us about the Turkey's Kurdish Movement's transnationalism. Consequently they give rise to the question of how it is possible to generalize and make claims for the phenomenon of transnationalism as a whole. How particular are my findings to the cases that I have studied, and what, if anything, can be extrapolated to other cases and/or applied to transnational political activism generally? More abstractly we could inquire into how it is possible to theorize at all from a single case-study?

There is, in fact, no consensus in the literature about the need to be able to generalize the findings of case-studies. Some authors, for example, argue that for case-studies particularity is more important than generality: what is being researched is the complexity of a single case, which, though by definition a case of *something*, is nevertheless of interest in itself, inherently, and irrelevant even of the larger picture. According to this approach, generalization may be possible, but in the sense that case-studies allow us to refine earlier generalizations by means of the observed specifics, leading to 'modified generalization', or, the refinement of our understanding through the

comparison of earlier case-studies with counter-examples (Stake 1995). Case studies, it is argued, do indeed contain a bias towards the falsification of preconceived notions, as opposed to their verification (Flyvbjerg 2006). This general approach can certainly be worked through for the case presented here, insofar as the research findings on the transnational political activism of the Kurdish movement that are presented help to refine our understanding of the diverging ways in which transnational political activism is conducted and what possible effects it is able to generate.

The external validity or the generalizability of the findings of this research, qualitative (and not quantitative), is described in the literature as 'transferability' (Guba & Lincoln 1994), which is dependent upon the presence or absence of 'thick descriptions'. Concretely, it depends upon whether or not enough information and/or detailed descriptions are provided of the phenomenon under study in order for readers to be able to determine how closely their situations (including cases they are studying) match the research situation, and hence transfer the findings in one case to another (Merriam 1995: 58). The findings of this research might be transferable to other case-studies, in particular to those for which much detailed (thick) information has been given to sustain the conclusions. My findings can be reformulated as generalizations in 'testable statements', and thus be made verifiable (open to confirmation and acceptance or denial and rejection) for future research, which I will try to explain more concretely in the concluding section of this dissertation. For example, we might expect that, for other ethnic minorities engaged in lobby work within the EU institutions (such as Albanians from Kosovo, for example) we might also find the importance of framing for bridge building, and of the role of human rights associations (both national and international) in sustaining political demands, as well as the need for transnational lobby work on the international EU level to be sustained by established political networks in the EU member states where ethnic minorities have settled (see findings).

Writing a PhD in the collection of articles format

The format of my PhD, a collection of articles and not a classical dissertation, is something new in the social and political sciences generally, and at our own Third World Studies Department. This formula is not without its problems, which I address here in the light of my own experience. Publishing articles and ultimately turning the collection of different articles into a dissertation posed a number of difficulties. First of all, one's assessments of the object (and subjects) under study change over time. The more we learn in the field, the greater range of perspectives we bring into the work, the harder it becomes to draw easy conclusions and the more intensely are earlier observations and analysis subjected to re-evaluation. The pressure to publish at an early stage in the research period, whatever its merits, does imply that one sometimes produces what ends up looking like a rather blurred picture of the reality studied. The first article that was written and submitted for publication, Chapter 3 in this dissertation, is exemplary of

this. Great importance was paid to the discursive strategies of the Kurdish activists aimed at stretching their political influence over multiple levels of political organization – including, for example, the Belgian Flemish parties. However, during the continuation of the research, when the relations of the Kurdish movement with members of the Flemish nationalist movement was further investigated, other matters came to the fore that seemed to have been at least as important as frame bridging to establish the support network amongst these regional politicians, such as the embeddedness of people's rights and minority rights in the traditions of the (Flemish) movement and its parties and the role that their political ideologues played therein, on the one hand, but also the politicians' very personal experiences of direct contact with the affected groups in the region (Turkey's Southeast), on the other (see Chapter 1). The first paper, I later judged, had underestimated the importance of the 'grounding' of the Kurdish issue on the national and regional level in Belgium, because at the time of writing I was not able yet to unravel how involved regional Flemish politicians were in tabling the Kurdish issue inside the European Parliament. These issues were therefore addressed later, in two other papers (Chapters 1 and 3).

Another example of the problems early publications might create is the following, from that same Chapter 3, submitted for review in the Winter of 2008 and thus a year and a half after the start of my research mandate. In this paragraph I wrote: *"Connections with nationally based Kurdish associations (in the receiving states) and their networks within a specific state (or states) are indispensable to a political party, like the DTP, in its struggle to gain Europe's attention. Dependent on only one official European representative for all contacts within Europe, the party relies on information and contacts provided by Kurdish associations and institutions in their different countries of residence. Although this dependency is an advantage for a political opposition party, it also implies that these European Kurdish associations (composed mainly of politically active members of the Kurdish diaspora), which are part of this political configuration, can weigh significantly on the initiatives that are undertaken by the DTP. We cannot explore this further in this paper, but clearly this has the effect of limiting the autonomy the party enjoys within Europe."* This paragraph later proved problematic, since it contained several statements which were no longer supported by newly gathered data. Indeed, the DTP (BDP) officially did only have one representative at the time, based in Brussels, but this person was supported (behind the scenes) by several experienced, full-time PKK-militants, as well a number of younger Kurdish PKK-militants who were skilled in one or more European languages. The DTP (BDP) would seem to be relying on a number of Kurdish associations and institutions, but most of these were not 'diaspora' associations as such, but part of the PKK-organizational umbrella in Europe. Thus the organization that 'weighs significantly' on the DTP (BDP) initiatives in Europe is the PKK (just as in Turkey), and thus not the European-based Kurdish associations that try to maintain a level of independence from the PKK (such as the Kurdish Institute of Brussels, KIB). Thus my concluding argument in the Conclusion of this PhD, that Europe-based Kurdish

associations such as the KIB are primarily 'accomodating' rather than 'steering' the transnational politics of the Kurdish nationalist movement.

Secondly, some papers may be very much complementary to one another – in this research, for example, the papers organized as the first three chapters (as just indicated). Other papers, though, may be harder to integrate into the main subject, if for example, they constitute inquiries within the general frame of the research project but stand as micro-studies in their own right. Here, for example, the micro-study of human rights institutionalization does, I would argue, contribute to our general understanding of (impediments to) the internationalization of the Kurdish cause, but it does not fit neatly into an unfolding narrative, the next of the series of chapters telling episodes of the story, as it were. The chapter on the process of human rights institutionalization, in fact, started out life as an article for a (European Journal of Turkish Studies) special issue on state-society relations in the Southeast, and was intended to inquire as to whether or not the change from the pre-accession to accession negotiations period and the relaxation of the armed conflict after 1999 had meant that human rights associations were in less need of engagement in transnational advocacy because they could more directly address human rights violations with the Turkish authorities (instead of having to work indirectly, through these transnational networks). During the interviews with human rights activists of different organizations, I came across the difficulties they were experiencing as a consequence of the institutionalization of human rights protection under EU pressure and this became the main focus of the article, consequently redirecting the article mostly on the developments inside Turkey and less on its transnational dimensions (although these were also addressed, as testifies the reading of Chapter 4).

Thirdly, as surely testify my problematization in the first half of this introduction, the collection of articles format has as one of its negative outcomes that it increases conceptual incoherence. The use of certain categories and concepts is often rendered inconsistent across the different chapters, which also relates the fact that as an author we relate our findings, and the ways we explain these, to the specific journals (and their readers and reviewers).

Despite difficulties regarding the congruity between different articles, processing a dissertation through the publication of articles has also had a number of advantages. Firstly, it allowed me to engage with intensive feedback from peers through the referee reports and the consequent revision and reworking of the papers. This left me less in the individual limbo and even solitude where some PhD students (have to) reside and made me feel more part of the community of scholars engaged in Turkish and Kurdish studies. Reserved and negative (even reactive) feedback in particular kept me acutely mindful of the issues related to violence (as described) – it was not just I who was uneasy with this aspect of the PKK, and I could not allow myself to become unobjective, through over-engagement (again, as discussed). Secondly, researching and writing with the objective of an article in mind helped me to focus and ground the research, and to review my

findings and translate them into more meaningful and accessible conclusions. Finally the concrete publication of articles was also a source of satisfaction, and motivation.

Structure of the dissertation

The dissertation consists of two parts, each gathering three articles. The first part engages with the 'Quest of transforming Turkey through Europe'. The first chapter traces back the genealogy of the political support for the Kurdish cause in Flanders and within factions of the European Parliament, paying particular attention to the role of political gatekeepers as well as Kurdish associations such as the Kurdish Institute of Brussels, in pro-Kurdish network building. The second chapter describes in detail how the Kurdish question entered the agenda of the European Parliament in its relation to Turkey, and gives an original – to my knowledge, the first – account of different characteristics of Kurdish diplomacy within that institution. The third chapter goes more depth on this, centering on the successfully lobbied case of the multilingual policy choice of one mayor of a Kurdish municipality in the Southeast.

The second part of this dissertation engages with the challenges and opportunities for the Kurdish nationalist movement's internationalization of the Kurdish cause. Chapter 4 deals with the institutionalization of human rights protection under EU pressure and its consequences for the relationship between the state and the human rights associations, paying particular attention to the side-lining of those associations that have come to be perceived as pro-Kurdish or even 'PKK' associations and its consequences for attracting EU back-up in its conflictual relationship with the Turkish authorities. Chapter 5 engages with the terrorist designation of the PKK. More particularly, the article seeks to explain how the designation as a terrorist organization has affected the PKK's approach to the Turkey-EU accession negotiations, arguing that the PKK has now made its support for the process conditional upon its own recognition as a legitimate political actor. Chapter 6 engages with a micro-study of the involvement by the Kurdish Movement in the Social Forum. In the context described, a Forum event staged in Diyarbakır, I see this in terms of an appropriation of the one movement (for international social justice) by another (of Kurds), arguing that this ought to be perceived less as a new means for the Kurdish movement to internationalize its cause, than as a vehicle for the movement to confirm and attest to the local achievements it has sought to realize and the vanguard role it seeks to play in the political and social transformation of the Middle East.

In the concluding section to this PhD I summarize the main findings of this research and try to assess in what ways they might contribute our understanding of transnationalism, the Kurdish question and European integration, and develop suggestions for future research.

Finally I need to mention the appendixes to this PhD, which contain two most relevant background papers that reflect upon the recent developments inside Turkey, as the changing political context of this research. They are *not* to be considered part of the collection of articles that constitutes this dissertation, but are included for their explanatory value. They do not only attest to an analysis of the developments on the ground, but they should also provide insight into my reading of these developments (and therefore also, my own development of a personal engagement). In addition the appendixes include a number of tables related to the opening chapter of this PhD on the political gatekeepers.

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Part 1:
**The quest to transform Turkey
through Europe**

1. Gatekeepers in Homeland Politics. The case of the Flemish nationalists' receptivity to the plight of Turkey's Kurds⁵

Abstract

Studies of transnational political activism or Diaspora politics have, more than often, disregarded the importance of political gatekeepers in the pursuit of immigrants' and refugees' political change back home. Gatekeepers are essential though for the politically engaged migrants to negotiate their way into host-country politics. When attention has been devoted to the role of gatekeepers, it has often been confined to resumes of those involved and the activities undertaken. Rarely has research engaged with questioning political gatekeepers themselves about their personal beliefs and viewpoints underlying their commitments to the cause. What is more, research has tended to overlook how certain alignments and cooperative relationships between transnational political actors and their gatekeepers in receiving countries have come into being, and how these genealogies might lend insight into the transnational advocacy networks and the particular types of activities transnational political actors have developed. This paper aims to help fill this lacuna, by providing original and unique insights into the genealogy of Flemish nationalists' support for Turkey's Kurdish nationalist movement. This case will testify to how more investigations into political gatekeepers can improve our understanding of how transnationalism materializes.

Keywords

transnationalism, Kurds, nationalist movements, Flanders, Turkey

⁵ A shortened version of this article is accepted for publication by *Social Identities*. The article is forthcoming in July 2011. Reference: Casier, M. (2011) Neglected Middle Men? Gatekeepers in Homeland Politics. Case: the Flemish Nationalists' Receptivity for the Plight of Turkey's Kurds. *Social Identities*, forthcoming.

Introduction

Diasporas influence international images, focus attention on issues of identity, and are able to affect foreign policy decision making (Barth & Shain 2003). Diaspora political elites are often strongly engaged with the political situation of the homeland, for which access to political gatekeepers is a *sine qua non*. Political gatekeepers are defined here as individuals and collective bodies (political parties, labor unions, NGOs) inside receiving states that enable those active in the pursuit of homeland political change to access the political terrains where they might affect the receiving countries' policies towards the homeland. Gatekeepers' roles should not be underestimated, as they not only enable access to the host-societies' political power structures, but also help to shape the collective organization of migrants and refugees by providing organizational models and related resources (Soysal 1994).

Despite the manifest importance of political gatekeepers, however, studies of transnational political activism or Diaspora politics have often disregarded their role in the pursuit of political change back home. When attention has been devoted to the gatekeepers, it has generally remained confined either to listings of the actors involved and the types of activities undertaken (Emanuelsson 2005, Østergaard-Nielsen 2001, Eccarius-Kelly 2002, Grojean 2008) or to more abstract generalizations about the assumed significance of the relations between the integration policies and citizenship regimes of the receiving states and the absence or presence of homeland political activism (Nell 2004, Koopmans et al. 2005). Although there has been some interesting research done from an agency-oriented perspective that treats as more meaningful the concrete transnational practices in respect of transnationalism's *how* (Østergaard-Nielsen 2001, 2003a & 2003b), this research did not however provide satisfactory explanations as to *why* certain political gatekeepers support the demands and efforts of transnational political activists, and sometimes at great lengths.

Of course it could be argued that political gatekeepers' primary incentives are the electoral support they can obtain by addressing the concerns of certain (ethnic) constituents, either directly for themselves (insofar as the gatekeepers are political parties), or indirectly (for those parties to which the gatekeepers are attached or lend support). The question, therefore, is how to explain the ongoing involvement of host-country politicians with small and electoral insignificant Diasporas. This makes the case at hand, that of the Kurds in Belgium, all the more interesting. Unlike the electorally significant numbers of people of foreign origin to be found in some countries, grouped for example by religion, such as Muslims in the UK (some one and a half million people, mostly of Pakistani and Indian descent), or by ethnicity, such as Kurds in Germany (estimated around 500,000, mostly from Turkey) the Kurds in Belgium number only an estimated 40,000 (of which less than half live in the Flemish speaking North of the country, the focus of this paper). Representing around a half of one percent of the total electorate, these citizens of Kurdish descent play no important role in the electoral strategies of the country's political parties. On the contrary, almost all the politicians

interviewed in the research presented here testified that their political engagements for the plight of the Kurds have never been something for which they were politically rewarded, either by Kurdish or by Belgian voters. Some have even been discouraged by fellow party members and by voters who deemed many issues more pressing than the engagement with what is regarded as other people's homeland politics. Kurdish transnational political actors have been able to translate their demands into Flemish politics, that is, despite their lack of electoral value.

Of concern here are those gatekeepers that are addressed through lobbying. Lobby work involves forms of transnational political practices and indirect homeland politics that transnational active migrants and refugees work with (Østergaard-Nielsen 2003b). With regards to the lobby work of transnational political actors, Østergaard-Nielsen was one of the first to investigate how some Diaspora groups manage to negotiate their way into the host-country political establishment when others remain outside of it (2003b). Her research, nevertheless, still focused primarily on the agents of transnational political activism, that is the Diaspora elites (providing insight into their strengths and weaknesses), and only secondarily on the importance of gatekeepers. More thorough investigations into the host-country political gatekeepers' relations with transnational political actors increase our understanding of 'negotiating ways in' (Østergaard-Nielsen 2003b). This type of inquiry attests to the importance of the personal as well as ideological beliefs of gatekeepers and their organizational embeddedness – but it can do more than that. Interesting but often overlooked are the particular ways in which alignments and cooperative relationships between transnational political actors and their host-country gatekeepers come into being. These so-called 'organizational genealogies' tell us more about the particularities of the transnational political practices employed by specific groups within Diasporas and how they develop. Moreover, these genealogies of cooperation reveal that exchanges between local political gatekeepers and transnational political activists are learning processes that generate specific types of initiatives. Additionally, organizational genealogies improve our understanding of the particular transnational advocacy networks that come into being through transnational activism.

Clearly there is thus something to be gained from a more in-depth inquiry of political gatekeepers. Until now, research has rarely engaged directly with the personal beliefs, viewpoints and experiences of political mediators that underlie their commitments to what are ultimately 'other people's causes'. An inquiry into this lends insight into gatekeepers' particular roles in transnational politics. This is in contrast to the increasing volume of research inquiring into the variety of reasons for the ongoing commitments of immigrants and (political) refugees to their country of origin (Alinia 2005, Smith & Bakker 2005, Argun 2003, Westwood & Phizacklea 2000, Schiller & Fouron, 1999). That these neglected middle men or political gatekeepers deserve more attention in studies of transnationalism is exactly what this paper intends to demonstrate, by means of an inquiry into the genealogy of Belgium's Flemish

nationalists' support for and organizational cooperation with Turkey's Kurdish nationalist movement.

The outline of the paper is as follows. To begin with, brief sketches are made of the Kurdish nationalist movement in Turkey and the Flemish nationalist movement in Belgium, depicting their main political actors, ideas and goals. Thereafter, the paper engages with the narrations of the latter's main political gatekeepers' interest in and involvement with the transnational political activism of Kurds in Europe in respect of the Turkish state. Particular attention will be devoted to the genealogy of the support for the plight of the Kurds as a 'people' as narrated by political personalities who have been key figures in the creation of a political space for discussion of Turkey's Kurdish question in Belgian and European politics.

The material for this paper was gathered through semi-structured interviews with (former) Flemish politicians who have long been involved with Turkey's Kurdish question and have actively undertaken political actions in support of the Kurdish nationalist movement's cause, as well as through additional archival research both into political initiatives in the Belgian and European Parliaments, and at the Kurdish Institute of Brussels. All quotations are from the author's personal communication with the individuals concerned, unless otherwise indicated (as a reference to published material). The research for this paper fits within a broader PhD. research project on the transnational political mobilization of Kurds in Europe and its impact upon the Turkish-Kurdish conflict in Turkey, to which end interviews and participatory observations were conducted with Kurdish transnational political actors in Europe and Turkey.

Turkey's Kurdish nationalist movement

The origins of the Kurdish nationalist movement in Turkey date back to the beginning of the 20th century. The establishment of the modern Turkish nation-state in the 1920s involved the abolition of the Caliphate and dismantling of the Ottoman theocracy along with the introduction of a more centralized authority (see Taspinar 2005, McDowall 1996). These developments were accompanied by a legitimacy crisis for the nationalist-secularist Ankara government in those provinces inhabited by Kurds, which tended to be more conservative (religious), had a long history of quasi-autonomy and nationalist aspirations of their own. Indeed, a Kurdish homeland in southeastern Anatolia had been prepared for in the 1920 Treaty of Sèvres, which dealt with the Allied dissolution of the Ottoman Empire (the Sèvres treaty was annulled and plans for an Anatolian Kurdistan abandoned with the success of the Turkish nationalists under Mustafa Kemal).

Several Kurdish nationalist rebellions broke out in the southeast of Turkey during the 1920s and 1930s. These were all crushed, ushering in a period of severe military repression with deportations and resettlement as the region fell under direct rule from Ankara and martial law (Taspinar 2005). Meanwhile, the new republic's instalment of

the Turkish language and introduction of systems of national education and military service served as instruments for the 'Turkification' of the Kurdish inhabitants in the southeast of the country. The new regime conceived of the Kurdish question as one of 'backward social forces' that were 'rebelling against a modern state power that promised progress and prosperity' and thus regarded in terms of a 'resistance of the past against the present' (Yeğen 2011: 69). From the 1950s onwards the Kurdish question would be debated as a problem of regional underdevelopment and its solution consequently seen to lie in economical integration (Yeğen 2011). The ethnic dimension denied, Turkish officials sought to prevent any collective public expression of Kurdishness, which led eventually even to a denial of the very existence of Kurds as a separate ethnic entity (Watts 2006, Öktem 2004, Yavuz 2001, Barkey & Fuller 1998). Many Kurds were assimilated as Turks during the first half century of the republic, and those who resisted continued to face strong restrictions and prosecutions. It took until the end of the 1960s for Kurds to start to politically (and culturally) organize themselves again. Indeed, with the public use of the Kurdish language of the majority of Turkey's Kurds, *Kurmanji*, so seriously confined, even the standardization of the language was developed mainly by Kurdish intellectuals living in exile in Europe (Kreyenbroek 1991).

The 1960s and 1970s saw the organization of various Kurdish political formations. Some, such as the TKDP and its successors the KUK and KIP were sister parties to the Kurdish Democratic Party (KDP) and the Patriotic Union of Kurdistan (PUK), present in Iraqi Kurdistan. Others, like the TSKP, *Kawa*, *Rizgari* and *Ala Rizagari*, were close to the Workers' Party of Turkey (TIP). A number of Kurdish dissidents grew from their involvement in the revolutionary Left of Turkey during the 1970s, with, in addition to the TIP, parties such as *Dev-Yol*, *Dev Sol*, and DHKP-C. The 1978 founded Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK) also originated from this movement (Jongerden & Akkaya 2010). Ahead of this, in the 1960s the 'Eastern Meetings' had taken place, which assembled leftist and Kurdish political activists seeking to expose and explain the economical backwardness of the Kurdish southeast. The maintenance of the feudal system due to the collaboration of (Kurdish) landlords with the central state in return for block votes was regarded as a major explanatory factor in this (a similar exchange of favors for support, essentially a continuation of Ottoman practice, had been employed by and since Atatürk to control the Southeast).

The successive military coups of 1971 and 1980 had a devastating effect on these political formations and their militants, leading to the imprisonment, death or exile of many of their leaders and followers by the beginning of the 1980s. Most of the leaders fled to Europe (Sweden and Germany in particular), far away from the homelands. The PKK had relocated to neighbouring Syria and was therefore one of the few leftist or Kurdish political formations to survive the 1980 coup, enabling it to reorganize inside Turkey and thus build a political and social support basis there (Jongerden & Akkaya, 2010). Given the history outlined along with the severe repression during the 1980-83 period of military rule and the subsequent re-installment of a military-guarded 'democracy', the PKK leadership and its followers saw armed struggle as their only

option in the quest to achieve political and socio-economical change in the structurally neglected Kurdish southeast of Turkey, as well as in the country as a whole.

In 1984, the PKK instigated an armed insurgency against the Turkish state and its military. The Turkish state met this with counterinsurgency measures that disregarded the rights of the population living inside the Kurdish inhabited provinces, and led to gross human rights violations extending to regular extra-judicial killings. First, following the withdrawal between 1983 and '87 of the nationwide martial law imposed after the 1980 coup, the Kurdish inhabited provinces of Turkey were governed under a state of emergency law (OHAL), equivalent in some parts of the Southeast to military occupation. Despite this, however, the PKK insurgency proved successful as the guerrilla force took effective control of large tracts of land in the region. Therefore, the government and army responded to PKK success with the implementation of a new strategy. This involved a cleansing of the countryside, with the destruction of hundreds of village and hamlets and wholesale eviction of a million people, perhaps more (Jongerden 2007).

During the early days of the war, a great number of internally displaced persons (IDPs) and others seeking safety and ways to sustain their livelihoods escaped to the big Kurdish cities (Diyarbakir, Van, Batman) and migrated to the western Turkish metropolises (Istanbul, Ankara Izmir). Many went to Europe, including political asylum seekers. This induced an acceleration of the urbanization of the Kurdish population, which in turn contributed to an increase in Kurdish political activism and the emergence of a Kurdish civil society and public sphere (Akkaya & Jongerden 2010, Watts 2006, Gambetti, 2008). By the beginning of the 1990s, the PKK had become a mass movement (Akkaya & Jongerden 2010, Romano 2006), enjoying popular and growing support among Kurds in Turkey and the Diaspora, where it became the main political player overseeing a significant number of associations (Grojean 2008). The PKK became the primary reference point for Kurdish national activism, offering a new, alternative set of national symbols to those of the Turkish state (Bozarslan 2000).

From 1990 onwards, Kurdish political activists sought parliamentary political representation through their own political party, the People's Labour Party (HEP). However, ethnically-based parties were (and remain) effectively banned (Watts 2006), and thus the HEP and successive pro-Kurdish parties DEP and HADEP in the 1990s each functioned for a period of time until their closure (on grounds of constituting a threat to the national integrity of the country and charges of separatism). Although the pro-Kurdish parties failed to pass the nationwide ten percent threshold necessary for representation in the Ankara parliament, in their leaders the Kurdish nationalist movement did gain a new set of public advocates (Watts 2006). Legal political activism was not easy, as those seeking to change Turkey's policies in regards to the Kurds often encountered violence. In fact, between 1991 and 2001, over a hundred members of the pro-Kurdish parties were murdered (Watts 2006), and many more suffered from arrests, torture, prosecution and imprisonment. With the support of national and

international human rights organizations, the serious human rights violations in Turkey increasingly came to the attention of the international community (Casier 2009, Watts 2004, Adamson 2002).

By the end of the 1990s, the Kurdish parties were winning many local offices in municipal elections, but the PKK had suffered serious military setbacks in the face of the tough counter-insurgency measures undertaken by the Turkish state, ultimately leading to the capture of its leader, Abdullah Öcalan, in January 1999 and the consequent withdrawal of most of its guerilla units across the border into Iraqi Kurdistan territory. The PKK declared a unilateral ceasefire in 1999, which has held (with breaks) since, resulting in a sharp decrease of the number of casualties and an end to the environment of insecurity. This was reinforced by a number of reforms instigated by the new government of the conservative and moderately Islamist Justice and Development party (*Adalet ve Demokrasi Parti*, AKP) in order for Turkey to be accepted as candidate for EU membership – including the 2002 lifting of the State of Emergency Law, which has allowed steps towards peace in the Kurdish inhabited provinces.

The initial aim of the PKK-led Kurdish nationalist movement had been to create an independent Kurdish state (ideally a unified one, of all Kurdistan). This was abandoned during the 90s when the PKK lost territorial control in Turkey and thus much of the popular ideological base it had attempted to build for an armed separatist struggle. The PKK was squeezed further in the wake of 9/11 and the ‘War on Terror’, when it was listed as an international terrorist organization. Despite these apparently fatal blows, however, the organization managed to maintain a significant influence, partly as a result of the Turkish state’s continuing reluctance to deal with the root problems that had led to its creation in the first place. The PKK balanced variable relationships with the legal pro-Kurdish parties and extended ceasefires signaling the ongoing attempts to find a peaceful settlement with occasional actions and a readiness to resort to the armed struggle.

With the positive political developments in the 2000s, Kurdish nationalists generally have been most concerned to establish the political legitimacy of their demands, which include finding a way to settle the armed conflict and allow the political integration of the PKK (Casier 2010b). The Kurdish nationalist movement today continues to seek recognition of the Kurdish nation in the Turkish constitution, to strive for Kurdish cultural rights and increased political autonomy in the Southeast. Kurdish activists in Europe generally support these goals and maintain intense exchanges with Turkey-based Kurdish activists and members of the Kurdish Freedom and Democracy Party (*Barış ve Demokrasi Parti*, BDP), as well as other smaller political parties.

Whereas it is no longer forbidden to speak Kurdish in public (which it was following the 1980 coup until 1991), only Turkish is permitted in most state arenas (Parliament, the courts, local service provision, etc) (see Casier 2010a). A public debate is emerging about the restoration of the thousands of Kurdish (primarily) place names that were

Turkified during the 20th Century in the eastern and southeastern provinces (see Öktem 2008). Under pressure from the European Union the number of restrictions with regards to the use of Kurdish in media and broadcasting has been reduced, and the organization of Kurdish language classes is now permitted.² Nevertheless, many regulations are still in place rendering it difficult to establish these, and (the right to) public education for children in the Kurdish mother tongue is still a taboo. In general Kurdish social and political life has remained under suspicion, with numerous court cases against Kurdish activists, journalists and politicians in addition to the regular party closures (on charges of separatism and/or support of a terrorist organization).

The Flemish nationalist movement

The Flemish nationalist movement dates back to the late 19th Century, some time after the foundation of the Belgian state in 1830. At the time of the country's foundation the official language was automatically assumed as French, the language of the political, economical and cultural elite of that time, and, moreover, symbolizing progress and modernity (Reynebeau 1995: 112-113). Various Flemish dialects were spoken by the public at large, but these were not yet unified into a single Flemish-Dutch language. Flemish was hardly used by the elites and was not considered as language of education. Similarly to Turkey, where Turkish became the language of the state and key to social and political integration, Belgium's independence (from the Netherlands) was followed by the establishment of French as the state's official language, the Dutch speaking majority were left in a position of economic and social subordination, with French as the key to upward mobility (Hossay 1996, Reynebeau 1995). Political power in Belgium was thus concentrated in a French speaking political and economical elite (Oosterlynck 2007), and Flanders and Wallonia as ethno-linguistic regions or communities had not yet emerged (Murphy 1988).

The development of the Flemish 'nation' was the fruit of the Flemish movement, built by Flemish militants (Reynebeau 1995: 119). It was thought that the nation found its expression through language, and in order to safeguard this, the relation between state, language and nation needed official recognition. The demand of Flemish nationalists was thus that nation and state should coincide, with language considered to enable the expression of the 'national character'. Faced with the necessity of learning French if ever they wished to climb up the social ladder, bureaucrats, teachers, writers journalists and intellectuals – 'people that live by the grace of words' (Reynebeau 1996: 126-8) – were particularly attracted to the Flemish movement. The lower middle classes or petty bourgeoisie were growing in numbers, but did not have any access to the political and

² A very limited state institutionalization of these liberalizations has occurred, notably the 2009 establishment of a mainly Kurdish language state TV channel (TRT6) and of the Living Languages of Turkey Institute at Mardin Artuklu University (with Language and Culture Departments for Kurdish, Arabic and Syrian).

economic power. It was in their interest, therefore, to find ways that would consolidate their position as a channel between the top and the bottom layers of society. They were people with few material means but significant cultural capital, of which 'mastery' of the common language constituted one of the most important forms. Dutch (or Flemish) thus came to represent the boundary between the powerful and the powerless and could operate as a means to define and empower this middle group (Reynebeau 1995). Respect was therefore demanded for the Dutch language of the ordinary people, and the Flemish nationalists were able to use language to help present themselves as the architects of solidarity between the different layers in society. As a result, the Flemish movement (similarly to Kurdish intellectuals in the Kurdish nationalist movement) concentrated on the standardization of ordinary language. Over time, an idea grew of the Flemish as a people who had been left behind and therefore unable to develop and become 'civilized', like the perception of the Kurds and the Southeast as underdeveloped and backwards (present among the Turkish state elites and expressed in statist ideology, but reflected also in the ideas of Kurdish and Turkish leftist activists).

By the end of the 19th century Flemish nationalism was present in three political parties, and by the turn of the century a new economic elite was also developing in Flanders that was sensitive to the connection made by the Flemish movement of the idea of the 'backwardness' of the nation's language to the cultural, scientific and economic underdevelopment of the region. This was particularly pertinent given the growing economic disparity between the French speaking north of the country, and the Dutch speaking south (Hossay 1996). The demands of the nationalist movement increased as regional 'self-governance' was demanded. When World War I came, part of the Flemish nationalist movement collaborated with the Germans, and another, socialist part the Belgian army against Germany, expecting their participation to be rewarded by the recognition of their demands. Central therein was the demand to recognize the equality of Flanders and Wallonia. At the end of the war, however, King Albert prevented Flemish nationalists from entering the government and obstructed the Dutchification of the universities and the army. Consequently, the soldiers killed in the First World War (70% of them Flemish) became martyrs, and this symbol of the suffering of the Flemish became a founding myth of the Flemish nationalist movement (Wils 2009). Not dissimilarly, the Kurdish nationalist movement would also continue to remind Turkey of the fact that Kurdish regiments fought for liberation from the Western powers alongside Mustafa Kemal (Atatürk), who would never deliver upon his promise of political recognition (Yeğen 2011).

Following the First World War the Flemish movement became more pluralistic and started to attach greater importance to pacifism and internationalism. As a result, it was also able to attract some support from communist dissidents from within the workers movement of that time, providing a channel to mobilize workers against the bourgeois upper classes (Reynebeau 1995). Thus, following WW I, Flemish nationalism became integrated into a broader ideological movement that considered its enemy to be not only 'Frenchness' but also the power-complex of the bourgeoisie, capitalism, the church, the

royal family and the Belgian state, lending a sense of aversion to the state and giving hopes for a radical revolution (Reynebeau 1995). Therefore the extreme left could consider Flemish nationalism as a progressive movement with a revolutionary potential, as at that time, very little was expected to come from parliamentary actions. The Christian Workers' Union (ACV) also played a growing role in support of the Flemish movements' demands, influencing the Christian Democrats (Wils, 2009).

These local developments coincided with an international call by US President Wilson for the right of each people to self-rule and a dream of new international order of 'peoples', coexisting in a peaceful new Europe, which could serve as a surrogate for a Soviet-style social revolution. During the interwar period all many of cultural, social and professional Flemish organizations came into being. In the 1930s, however, some of them came under the influence of social-nationalism and collaborated with the German occupiers in WW II, bringing the Flemish nationalist movement into great discredit in the decades following the war, only to revive again by the late 1950s and early 60s, when the Flemish economy was enjoying a period of steady growth.

As the radical wing of the Flemish movement was marginalized because of the wartime collaboration, it was the moderates that would take the lead in the Flemish struggle for self-rule (Oosterlynck 2007). In 1954 people from within this part of the Flemish movement founded the People's Union Party (*Volksunie*, VU), which became the sole alternative to the main traditional parties (Christian-Democrat, Liberal and Socialist). The People's Union addressed social and ecological problems and the party was able to attract social groups that felt excluded from the economic growth: small-holders and farm workers, miners and youth. Flemish nationalism became attractive to people on the left once more, and the party further developed the idea of federalism and regional autonomy (Reynebeau 1995). From 1970 to 1993, under pressure from a growing call for autonomy, the Belgian state would gradually evolve into a full-fledged federal state, delegating ever more power to the regions and thus 'hollowing out its center' (Hooghe, 2004). In 1977, following an important national compromise over the future of the country's federalization (known as '*Egmontpact*'), the most radical wing of the People's Union party split off, establishing itself in 1987 as the Flemish Bloc (*Vlaams Blok*, VB to change into *Vlaams Belang* in 2004), in defense of full-fledged Flemish independence and with an extreme rightist agenda. The rump People's Union party would splinter further during the 1990s–2000s, (see below). Today, part of the Flemish nationalist movement seeks the consolidation of its current autonomous position within the borders of Belgium (SLP & part of the members of the Christian democrat CD&V), whereas another part demands separation (NV-A and *Vlaams Belang*).

The Flemish-Kurdish nexus

Narrating the origins of a long-lasting relationship

In reconstructing the long-lasting relationship between Flemish and Kurdish nationalists, focus falls first on the political personality of one of the founding fathers of the federalist idea in Flanders, Flemish nationalist activist and politician Maurits Coppieters. Coppieters counts as one of the main ideological leaders on the left of the Flemish movement, later referred to by all the interviewed (former) People's Union politicians involved with the plight of the Kurds. Specializing in education, he was a fierce advocate of federalism and self-governance for the Flemish community in Belgium.

Federalism was thought most appropriate for the democratization of society, as it was thought to bring governing authority closer to the citizens, who were thus enabled to control it. The Flemish struggle for autonomy as well as the idea of a unified Europe was inspired by the idea of federalism, as Nelly Maes, former MEP and follower of Coppieters, recalls (Maes 2009). Federalism and pluralism were written into the People's Union party's program from 1967. Coppieters also developed a particular interest in the peace movement, promoting world peace and contesting the nuclear arms race and the trade in weapons more generally (Dedeurwaerder 2009). Situated on the left of the movement, and conscious of the movement's dark past of collaboration with Nazi Germany, Coppieters was wary of instrumentalizing a discriminatory nationalist language, and explicitly promoted the pluralist character of the party. This stood in contrast with the extreme-rightist and racist Flemish Bloc (VB), from which all Flemish political parties have sought to distance themselves, from 1989 onwards respecting a '*cordon sanitaire*', an agreement to desist from political agreements with the VB in order to protect democracy from undemocratic elements.

We take up the story in 1979 when, following a decade and a half as Flemish representative in the Chamber and Senate, Coppieters becomes the first People's Union member to be elected to the European Parliament. During his short period as an MEP, he draws attention to and support for the idea of a 'Europe of peoples', taking initiatives on behalf of the Basques, Bretons and Corsicans. Coppieters instigates a closer political cooperation between the autonomist and federalist parties in the European Parliament, which in June 1979 sign the European Charter of Peoples without a State (Dedeurwaerder 2009). Putting his faith in people's nationalism as a leading principle that needs to be integrated and valorized in international politics, Coppieters rejects what he called 'pretentious' and 'harmful' 'state nationalism'. Cooperation for European integration is seen as safeguarding the future of Flanders, as well as other regions and their peoples. Coppieters considers federalism as the means to achieve a 'democracy of peoples' and regards ethnicities, language regions and economic regions as constitutive elements of a Europe that would allow a 'human-size' democracy (De Beul & De Beul 2009: 162). Europe cannot be anything if it is not a Europe of peoples or regions,

according to Coppieters. Drawing on the work of Maurits Van Haegendoren (another important ideologue of the Flemish nationalist movement) Coppieters argues that 'being a people's nationalist also means being one for others', thereby showing solidarity with people's struggles for self-determination worldwide (ibid: 163). In the plenary of the European Parliament, he argues:

"Millions of Europeans of our Member-States are not represented here in their own identity. We federalists believe in a strong supranational power, if and upon the condition that the Member-States allow the clear distinction of regions and lend an identity to the peoples. Certain peoples are not only denied a proper identity but in some Member-States they find themselves even considered suspects" (Coppieters cited in Vanhaelewyn 2009:163).⁶

The 1981 establishment of the European Free Alliance (EFA) in the European Parliament, which marks the beginning of a growing political space for regionalist politics at the European level, is considered the heritage of Coppieters and his followers' dedication to the federalist dream in relation to the project of European integration (De Winter & Gomez-Reino Cachafeiro 2002). It is the inspiration and idealism of Coppieters that is later to find expression in the engagements of Flemish nationalist politicians with the Kurdish cause, both in national and international politics. And it is in this strong internationalism of the Flemish nationalist movement that the rationale for its commitment to the plight of the Kurds is embedded.

The political is personal? The political mediators' beliefs and party commitments

"This is the core of being a nationalist: one cannot be a nationalist without being an internationalist. And of course, the carrier of this is the respect for every people. Every people has a right to self-rule" (Willy Kuijpers, 20 July 2009).

During the period when the People's Union Party emerged – the decade between the mid-60s and mid-70s – political parties in defense of a threatened language, culture or region sprung up all around Europe (Bouveroux & Huyse 2009: 146-147). Some of these parties arose from a growing frustration at enduring neglect or economic decay of their region, such as the Basque country and Galicia in Spain, or Scotland and Wales in the United Kingdom. Others, such as Spanish Catalonia or Northern Italy were no longer willing to share the gains they had achieved with the poorer part of the country. A number of these parties would engage with violence as a means to achieve change, whereas others sought to attack the national state through the ballot box (Bouveroux & Huyse 2009: 146). What all of these movements shared was a yearning for greater independence and a sense of being trapped and locked in the states of which they were unwilling parts (ibid, 2009).

⁶ All translations from Dutch/Flemish by the author.

The People's Union was in contact with these regionalist and nationalist parties, even ahead of the formalization of these contacts in the European Free Alliance in 1981. Many of the politicians that would later visit the Kurdish regions and develop an interest in the Kurdish cause had started off as youngsters by joining delegations to the Basque country in the 1970s. As former President of the People's Union and Flemish Minister of Culture Bert Anciaux recalls:

"My involvement with the Kurds grew from my involvement with the Basques. I must have been 14 years old the first time I went to the Basque country. That was together with Willy Kuijpers. Later on I went back many times by myself. That was during the struggle against the dictatorship [i.e. Franco's], when it was accessible. And, how shall I say, it was hard to deny that, to put it simply, 95 percent of the people in Basque country had a serious problem with Spain's state-nationalism" (Bert Anciaux, 23 October 2009).

Bart Staes, former People's Union politician and current member for the Flemish Green party in the European Parliament, explains:

"There was a journal called *Werkgroep Arbeid* that later turned into *Meervoud*. In these journals there was coverage of minorities. I got in touch with that journal through my teachers at high school who were People's Union-sympathizers. Later on I joined the People's Union and got to know people like Willy Kuijpers, Maurits Coppieters, Karel Van Reeth and Jaak Vandemeulebroecke. The involvement with human rights and the rights of minorities developed from a sense of justice" (Bart Staes, 3 May 2007).

The source of inspiration for many Flemish nationalist at that time, *Werkgroep Arbeid* was the journal of the Flemish nationalist movement's leftist wing. The international coverage of this journal focused attention on (local) national minority issues as well as on liberation movements in other parts of the world, such as those of South Africa and Palestine or in Central and South America. This was the period of incipient post-colonialism, a time of great activity in local consciousness and political identity formation. There was a rejection of the vestiges of the old imperial system which was related to demands for liberation not only of but also within states, in the imperialist centers themselves and in those that had been established by and through the imperial system and the process of its dissolution. Thus the sense of common cause, the affiliation with and between radically different nationalist groups with wildly diverging experiences, such as emerged in the Flemish/Kurdish case.

The variety within the transnational movement as a whole – insofar as that is an appropriate labeling – was reflected within nationalist movements, which housed pacifists with insurrectionists and communists with Christians. In such cases the common cause of nationalism was rarely strong enough to prevent splintering, and in 2002 the People's Union fell victim to a right-left divide, the conservatives forming the New Flemish Alliance (*Nieuw-Vlaamse Alliantie*, N-VA), and the social-liberals forming Spirit. Recently (2008-9), the latter changed its name (to become the SLP) and then merged with the Green party, but the former continues to operate, espousing the secession of Flanders from Belgium.

Reviewing the position of the Flemish nationalists as it has developed over the past four decades, Jan Loones summarizes the commitment within the People's Union thus:

“As people's nationalists, within the People's Union and currently within the New Flemish Alliance [N-VA], we have always paid attention to all peoples living in comparable circumstances and struggling for their own identity, a thing that also needs to result into the state structures. That is why we sympathize with other communities in the world that strive for the same goals. This is valid for the Kurds, Palestinians, Catalans, Basques, etc. Within the People's Union this was strengthened because it was a party that incorporated this internationalism. We are nationalists, but we've always been democratic and open [minded] nationalists. As Luyten [former party ideologue and follower of Coppieters] said, “Flanders cannot turn inwards into itself” (Jan Loones, 15 August 2009).

Like their inspiration, Coppieters, the succeeding generation(s) of Flemish nationalist politicians of all persuasions, left and right, have continued to insist upon the need to distinguish between the ‘people's nationalism’ they adhere to and what is defined as ‘state nationalism’. State nationalism is the ideal of a unitary state is perceived as something backward and outdated that has created nothing but ill effect with its insistence on the credo of one nation, one culture and one language. As Kuijpers notes, ‘We should not deny that, just like any ideology, nationalism is at its most unacceptable extreme within a democracy.’ The sense of prudence is related back to a strong belief in federalism and the project of the European Union as a union of the regions as guarantor of a peaceful co-existence. It is even the belief of some that it is due to the Flemish nationalist movement that the concept of a federalist state – as an alternative to the unitary state – has spread across Europe and into the Kurdish nationalist movement. In Kuijpers' words, ‘We have taught those peoples the meaning of federalism.’

From encounter to institutionalization

The engagement of Flemish politicians with the Kurdish question originated in the tense 1960s. Willy Kuijpers – later to be elected to the Belgian Chamber of Representatives of the People and European Parliament – was active as a militant for the People's Union party youth branch, *Volksuniejongeren* (VUJO) when, in 1967, he met the Kurdish political refugee Dr. Ismet Sheriff Vanly. Later to become an advocate of the PKK struggle against the Turkish state, at that time Vanly was supporting the political struggle of Mollah Mustafa Barzani's Kurdish Democratic Party of Iraq, the KDP. Maurits Coppieters invited Vanly to Flanders. Recalling his first meeting with Sheriff Vanly, Kuijpers argues:

“We understood each other right away, as from within his philosophy Sheriff Vanly understood federalism and understood that it is possible for one language group to cooperate across the borders (as the Flemish and Dutch intellectuals and linguists did at the time), without being one and the same state” (Willy Kuijpers, 20 July 2009).

It was through Vanly that Kuijpers made contact with the Kurds in Iraq. After Kuijpers had been elected to the Belgian Parliament and as a member of the Commission for Foreign Affairs he made several visits to the Iraq of the Baath regime in the 1970s. 'When we were there and travelling through the country, we found Iraq to be some kind of Switzerland of the Middle East', Kuijpers recalled, surprised to discover the presence of many ethnic and religious minorities living within the borders of country. At that time, the Kurdish political opposition in Iraq enjoyed the support of the Soviet Union in the Cold War against the West and its Middle Eastern allies (i.e. Saddam Huseyin's Baath regime, which was supported against Iran). In 1979, however, the Soviet support was withdrawn and Kurdish political activists and intellectuals were expelled from the Lumumba University of Moscow, where they had been studying. A new generation of the Kurdish opposition living in exile in Austria turned to Kuijpers. 'The question was whether I couldn't do anything for these students,' he explains. This happened just at the time that the Flemish nationalist movement managed to secure its first government minister, Van Elslande Minister for Dutch Culture, a Flemish nationalist from the then Christian People's Party (*Christelijke Volkspartij*, CVP), now the Christian Democrat & Flemish Party, (*Christen-Democratisch en Vlaams*, CD&V). The newly inaugurated minister granted twelve scholarships to the Kurdish students and Kuijpers – with the help of other members of the local People's Union branch – was able to get the students enrolled into higher education institutions (including university of Leuven). A student house was set-up and which was to serve as a political secretariat for the Kurds in exile.

"We thought, let's put all these scholarships together in order to get things running. These students will get along with one another and we can start up a secretariat. Some People's Union families had put their holiday-savings together and so we could furnish the place. We were so confident that things would progress from that point on!"

But they did not. Not only did the students' educational levels appear to be far from sufficient in order to succeed at the enrolled courses, what was worse, the twelve were split over party and ideological lines and constantly fighting over the political direction that the Kurdish movement needed to take, (with one fraction adhering to Barzani's KDP and the other to its rival, the PUK). Although united in the KSSE, the Kurdish Student Union in Europe the dream of a secretariat for the Kurds and Kurdistan in the heart of Europe was short-lived.

It was in 1978, during the existence of the KSSE, that TEKOSER (the Kurdish Workers and Students Association in Belgium) was set up. The name 'TEKOSER' was the Kurdish acronym for the Kurdish Workers and Student Association, and also a Kurdish word meaning 'militant'. Established in Brussels, by that time the de facto capital of the EEC (before it became the European Union) as well as the capital of Belgium, TEKOSER was initiated by Kurdish political refugees from Turkey, including Derwich Ferho. Derwich Ferho had arrived the previous year at the age of eighteen, having fled the city of Midyat (in southeast Turkey) where he had been engaged in the Midyat Revolutionary Cultural Hearth Association (*Devrimci Kultur Ocağı Derneği*), at that time led by Orhan Miroğlu

(later to become a respected intellectual and public personality for the Kurdish nationalist movement). Frustrated with the immobility of the KSSE, the internal ideological strife and the KSSE orientation to Iraqi Kurdistan – disregarding, he thought, the other parts of Kurdistan – Ferho had sought a new group of companions.

TEKOSER gathered a small group of seven Kurdish individuals, among whom were sympathizers of the Turkish Communist Party (*Türkiye Komünist Partisi*, TKP), Socialist Workers' Party of Turkey (*Türkiye Sosyalist İşçi Partisi*, TSİP), the Revolutionary Cultural Associations of the East (*Devrimci Doğu Kültür Derneği*, DDKD) and the Turkish pro-Kurdish parties Liberation (*la Rizgarî*) and Freedom Path (*Rîya Azadî*). AFerho had sought cooperation amongst sympathizers and militants of different revolutionary leftist parties already present in Belgium, such as the Turkish Workers Party (*Türkiye İşçi Partisi*, TIP), *Dev Yol*, *Dev Sol* and the Revolutionary People's Liberation Party (*Devrimci Halk Kurtuluş Partisi*, DHKP). However, as Ferho recalls difficulties arose time and again over the Kurdish issue, with Ferho and his companions considered Kurdists and thus, as he recalls, 'separatist' and a 'cause of division within the working class' (Derwich Ferho, 17 March 2010). This ideological dispute among the European Kurdish Diaspora reflected similar divisions inside Turkey, where the Kurdists eventually broke-away from the revolutionary left in order to address the particularities of the situation in the Southeast (see Jongerden & Akkaya 2011). Ferho sought to promote the rights of the Kurds 'as a people'. Indeed, he was later to work with the Kurdish Institute in support of Kurdish parties from the right as well as the left of the spectrum.

During the first years of TEKOSER a strong relationship developed between Derwich Ferho, and the People's Union Party. Kuijpers actively supported Ferho and introduced him into the networks of the Flemish nationalist movement of that time. One of the main reasons why Ferho was successful in the maintenance of relations with these networks was because he was one of the first Kurdish political activists in Belgium to master the Dutch (Flemish) language. What is more, he actively started to relate the beliefs of the Kurds with the beliefs of the Flemish in Belgium, having been thought Dutch by pro-Flemish teachers and being in touch with the leftist Flemish nationalist youth active in the journal *Werkgroep Arbeid/Meervoud* (see above).

Ferho recalls how he managed to extend his contacts and increase pro-Kurdish activities through publishing and selling books about the Kurdish issue at a variety of political and social meetings:

"Whenever there were congresses, I was present with my bookstand. When parliamentarians would pass by they'd say 'Oh, Kurds...' and this is how we got to know each other. I didn't let a single one of them pass by without buying a book. Not that they had to, but they were sold a book and they had to pay. Then I'd get their card with their addresses and the following day I'd be calling them to invite them for dinner, in order to discuss future initiatives" (Derwich Ferho, 17 March 2010).

In 1989, TEKOSER became the Kurdish Institute of Brussels, in order to develop a more respectable image and in parallel with the in 1983 established Kurdish Institute of Paris. When Hugo Schiltz was elected onto the Flemish Executive (predecessor of the Flemish Parliament), he facilitated the necessary subsidies for the Kurdish Institute. With the consequent growth of the Institute attracting the attention of Flemish nationalist politicians, the Kurdish question gained visibility in public and political life, both in Flanders and in Belgium as a whole.

See it and believe: the mobilizing role of delegations

Drawing from his experiences with diplomatic delegations to the Middle East, and with the help of Derwich Ferho and his contacts inside Turkey and the European Kurdish Diaspora, Kuijpers initiated several political 'delegations' to Turkey. As Kuijpers explains, 'I've always believed strongly in what I call the "Thomas effect": seeing things first to believe them', in reference to the Christian narration of the unbelieving apostle Thomas. By means of the delegations Kuijpers actively sought to convert other Flemish nationalist and non-nationalist politicians into 'believers' if not 'advocates' of the Kurdish cause:

"We asked people to come along. People that we thought would be sensitive to this kind of issue. What was the result? These people saw what was happening over there and as a consequence the motions for resolutions in parliament that would formerly only enjoy the support of the People's Union were being signed by these people" (Willy Kuijpers, 20 July 2009).

It was not only the delegation members who were led to support parliamentary resolutions as they, in turn, succeeded in convincing other politicians within their own parties on the merits of the Kurdish cause in Turkey. Thus did political support grow in Belgium during the 1980s and the 1990s. The submission of formal questions (interpellations) in the bicameral Belgian Parliament (i.e. in the Chamber of Representatives and Senate) as well as the resolutions (see Appendixes) reflect 1) the concerns of the Belgian (bi-cameral) Parliament with events in Turkey, as well as 2) the internal dynamics vis à vis this issue within Belgian politics and those of Europe, and 3) the perception of the PKK as a terrorist organization; they also 4) provide a window to some of the dramatic developments in the armed conflict with Turkey.

Ferho describes the importance of the delegation as such:

"If we Kurds address the outside world and try to expose our problems, okay, yes, people believe it. However, if the same problem is exposed by the people actually living here, active within politics, academia, associational life, than it is even more credible. And in some ways it is also more objective, as we are in the middle of these problems and we ourselves are still victims and thus subjective" (Derwich Ferho, 17 March 2010).

That the delegations made indelible impressions on their members is not surprising. In the 1980s Turkey's politics and civil society were still suffering heavily from the consequence of the 1980 military coup. Hundreds of thousands political prisoners were incarcerated, with leftist and Kurdish activists in particular targeted. Turkey's Kurdish question came to prominence as the escalating armed conflict in Turkey's southeast led to increased state repression and serious human rights violations. Delegations attended trials of political activists and conducted fact-finding missions to assess the human rights violations in the region, as well as gave humanitarian assistance for the war refugees in the country.

With the Kurdish-inhabited provinces of the country under a de facto military occupation, the delegations sometimes faced major obstacles when leaving the city for the 'war zone'. Kuijpers recalls the difficulties experienced when seeking to access the provinces under emergency law with the aid convoy, facing the military officials in charge:

"I had a serious row with Kozakcioğlu, who was the military governor of the Kurdish provinces. He would not allow us to enter with our trucks full of humanitarian aid. We were blocked for days on end. I went to see Kozakcioğlu, who knew French very well. He said, "*Vous aimez les Kurds? Amenez-les!* [You love the Kurds? Take them with you, then!]"."

Ferho argues, "One need not be very theoretical, no. If you've had certain experiences once, twice, three times maybe, this makes you a different person". Telling, in this sense, are the recollections of former Christian People's Party (CVP) MP Hugo Van Rompaey of his first delegation trip:

"Everything moved me there. We've talked with so many people. Victims of torture were giving testimony of their sufferings and we visited the burned villages. That is the problem of diplomats and many of our politicians. They haven't got any affinity with what is happening on the ground. They move by plane from one capital to the next and never get to see the people it is really about. We talked to an eighteen year-old girl who had just been released from custody. It was a difficult encounter for me as I had a daughter at exactly the same age. Her wrists were full of scars but she wanted to talk to us about what had happened to her. We stood there listening, with tears in our eyes" (Hugo Van Rompaey, 7 August 2009).

Jan Loones, member of the Flemish nationalist People's Union (currently N-VA) recalls his memories of another delegation in the late 1990s:

"When we were received in the village of Mizizah... I can still feel the hands of Derwich Ferho's mother holding mine. I was drawn into the house. I was the only politician in the group then. What I recall very well was a little piece of paper that she put into my hands I've kept since. Later on I had the text on the paper translated. It contained all the names of the Ferho family that had left Turkey for Europe and should not return to Turkey because they were under threat. That is the cruelest thing that a mother can overcome when you have to tell your sons not to return because they'd be under serious threat.

That memory will stay with me all my life and of course it was deepened when they faced that drama, when both Derwich Ferho's parents were brutally murdered. I've interpellated the Flemish Parliament on that matter." (Jan Loones, 15 August 2009).

The personal recollections of politicians testify to the lasting commitments that have often followed from participation in delegations. As Loones continues:

"The result [of taking part in the delegation] was that I left as a sympathizing observer and I returned as a Kurdish militant. Of course, the weapons of a member of parliament are asking questions, interpellations. Besides that, I've also tried to take the experiences of that delegation to the People's Union Party and to steer not just the standpoints of individual party members but the party position itself. In the party's presidency I've had a resolution voted that brought it to take a strong stand on the Kurdish issue, which was the party's support for the construction of a nation [nation-state]. Later on, this party position evolved and we've come to argue that we will be supportive of whatever the Kurds themselves would like to achieve."

Taking part in the delegations has (1) a mobilizing effect on the participating politicians or (2) reaffirms earlier commitments. Evidence of this is the instigation and timing of resolutions put to vote in the Belgian Parliament regarding the plight of the Kurds: the resolutions were instigated primarily by participants to delegations and related to the timing of the organized delegations. In Christmas 1990, for example, a delegation to the Kurdish Southeast was initiated jointly by the Kurdish Institute of Brussels and Willy Kuijpers, and joined by the parliamentarians Hugo Van Rompaey (CVP), Jef Sleenckx (Socialist Party, SP) and Hugo Van Dienderen (AGALEV, forerunner to the Flemish Green party, *Groen!*) was followed first by a resolution from the three participating parliament members in March 1991 – 'Concerning the problem of the Kurds and other ethnic minorities in Turkey' (which was accepted in the plenary of the Chamber) – and then, later that same month, by a resolution from Willy Kuijpers – 'Concerning the right to exist of Kurds in Turkey, Iran, Iraq and the Soviet-Union' (which was accepted by the Belgian Senate). Hugo Van Rompaey would write two more resolutions in March and July 1993 – the first 'concerning the oppression of the Kurds in Turkey', and the second 'concerning the advancement of the peace process and the restoration of human rights in the southeast of Turkey' (both accepted).⁷ Earlier that year, in February 1993, Hugo Van Dienderen and Jef Sleenckx joined to formerly question the Belgian Minister of Foreign Affairs Willy Claes about a hunger strike of over 700 Kurds in Brussels in solidarity with the sufferings lived in Turkey. In June 1996, Van Dienderen interpellated the Minister of Interior Affairs Johan Vandelanotte a second time over hunger striking Kurds in order to demand what kind of actions the Belgian government would be taking with regards to Turkey, and in November 1996 he interpellated the Minister of Justice, Stefaan De Clerck concerning raids in several Kurdish associations and the Kurdish satellite TV stations in Denderleeuw, condemning the Belgian authorities for acting on Turkey's request (a charge denied). When another hunger strike was launched in the

⁷ See <http://www.dekamer.be>

spring of 1998, this time by Kurdish asylum seekers facing possible expulsion, Hugo Van Rompaey joined the hunger strikers in order to demonstrate his solidarity and Jef Sleenckx threatened the Minister of Interior Affairs of his own party with blocking parliamentary decisions in which his vote was needed to achieve a majority if the expulsion decision were not redrawn (the decision was ultimately withdrawn and the Kurdish refugees stayed).

The delegations were primarily organized at the level of Flemish politics, but they also involved members of civil society organizations, such as unionists and human rights activists. In 1996 – at a time when an increasing number of political asylum seekers were arriving following the increased intensity of the armed conflict after 1993, the support network originating from the delegations was widened with a campaign called ‘Coordination Stop the War against the Kurdish People’, which was signed by members of 150 associations. The Coordination called upon Turkey to respect human and people’s rights and to seek a political solution to the armed conflict, and upon Europe to cease all arms trade with Turkey. This campaign was later to evolve into an ‘interparliamentary working group for the Kurds’, meeting on a monthly basis at the premises of the Belgian Senate to discuss the evolution of the Turkey’s Kurdish issue and the situation of the Kurds in Kurdistan as a whole, and to develop different forms of political action (see also Casier 2011). Indeed, just as the Kurdish Institute of Brussels became the concrete embodiment of the political engagements of Kurdish and Flemish activists and politicians described, the interparliamentary working group can also be considered as another organizational outcome of the learning process between both activists in both movements, demonstrating the development of a more formalized system of transnational advocacy that continues to exist.

Just as a demand was made for the Turkish state to seek a political solution, so also was recognition given to the political fight for social justice in which the PKK was engaged. To this end, parliamentary questions were tabled which elicited from government ministers the linkage of the PKK with ‘terrorism’. In March 1998, for example, in response to an interpellation by Alfons Borginon (People’s Party, VU-ID, a split of from the VU) of the Minister of Foreign Affairs Derycke concerning ‘the Kurdish problem’, the minister stated that the European authorities condemned the terrorism by the PKK and considered it a terrorist organization. This question and answer clearly exposes the primary ideological fault line within Belgian politics on this issue – with the Flemish nationalists supporting (in solidarity with) the Kurdish nationalists and opposed by the Belgian government embodying the Belgian state, which was structurally (‘naturally’) aligned with the Turkish government embodying the Turkish state, the former concerned primarily with the socio-political problem (and its humanitarian consequences), the latter with state security (and violent threats posed to it). On the subject of state security (or dominance), this parliamentary exchange also reveals the early characterization of the PKK as ‘terrorist’, long before its official entry onto the European terrorist list in 2002, indicative not only of the automatic assumption of a status quo statist discourse by the Belgian government (state), but also of its concerns

regarding the internal security situation (its perception of and approach to PKK activities in Belgium and Western Europe).

The development of interest as revealed by the political activity in Belgium linked to the parliamentary delegations may be instructive. Essentially, this can be understood as showing the commitment of Flemish nationalists to the Turkish Kurdish cause, the range of interest and actions, and how the focus of interest (of the Flemish nationalists) changed as the substantive concerns were framed by theory and experience. The very direct effect of personal commitment is evidenced by the results of the July 1991 delegation of Willy Kuijpers to Diyarbakir. Kuijpers was attending the funeral march for the murdered HEP politician Vedat Aydın, when it transformed into a protest demonstration, which was met in turn by heavy repression and violence by the security forces and military present. A young journalist-student in the delegation managed to catch the event on videotape, which was then smuggled out of the country and broadcast in the main news program on Belgian national television.

The actions undertaken by the politicians during the 90s were really quite wide ranging. In addition to the delegations to Turkey, parliamentary interpellations, resolutions and proposals for resolutions, and Coordination Stop the War campaign, there was a delegation to Iraqi Kurdistan that incorporated a visit to the PKK mountain guerilla camp (December 2002); there were press conferences and parliamentary calls for resolution proposals highlighting a number of specific events and giving public voice to a relatively radical perception of issues, such as the idea that Turkey was in the wrong, and direct action in support of the Kurds should be taken, for example with a call for a weapons embargo and a tourism boycott of Turkey (March 1994); and Hugo Van Rompaey (CVP) even joined the hunger strikes of Kurdish asylum seekers in Belgium facing expulsion (referred to above).

In respect of the development of the Turkish Kurdish public discourse in Belgium, looking just at the broad brush strokes as shown in the titles of parliamentary resolutions / proposed resolutions – we observe an identifiable trend, with first a definition of interest, followed by a focused commitment, and then a pinpointing of single issues. To begin with, the concern of the Flemish nationalists tended to be rather general, not focused on the specific question of the Kurds in Turkey (as opposed to Kurds elsewhere, or other minorities in Turkey). Thus the first three (accepted and/or proposed) relevant resolutions concerned ‘the Kurds’ (September 1989), and ‘the Kurds and other ethnic minorities in Turkey’ and ‘the Kurds in Turkey, Iran, Iraq and the Soviet Union’ (both March 1991, referred to above). After that, an exclusive concentration on the Turkish situation developed, and the language became more engaged. The vocabulary of (primarily Flemish) Kurdish (nationalist) sympathizers in Belgium term changed, as the phrase ‘right to exist’ (March 1991) and word ‘protection’ (March 1992), became ‘oppression’ (March ’93), and, at around the time of the zenith of PKK military power, ‘Turkish Kurdistan’ (May ’93), the most Kurdist language employed in (proposed) resolutions, i.e. insofar as it referred to the area as a part of Kurdistan, not

Turkey (c.f. 'the Kurdish people in Turkey', or 'the Southeast'), a redefinition of the conflict in Turkey as a civil war (May 1993), which would obviously be in direct contradiction of the position adopted listing the PKK as a terrorist organization. Next, specific issues were identified: human rights (July '93), imprisonment of MPs (January '95), refugees (March '98), and the death penalty sentence for captured PKK leader, Abdullah Öcalan (June 2000). Again, the subject of the death penalty relates to the wider perspective of Europe – indeed, a resolution and a proposal for one on Turkey's accession/candidature process for the EU followed (in November 2002 and December '03).

From the regional politics of Flanders into the 'Europe of the regions'

The Flemish-Kurdish nexus that originated in the 1960s and 1970s and evolved into the 1980s and 1990s directly affected the attention given to the Kurdish issue in the European Parliament. It was through Ferho's contacts in the People's Union that the first Kurdish initiatives towards the European Parliament were undertaken. In February 1982 eight different European based Kurdish organizations (KKDK, KOC-KAK, KOMKAR, *Mala Gelê Kurd*, YXXKF, AKSA, KXPK and TEKOSER⁸) were brought together by Ferho in order to make a first visit to MEPs in Strasbourg. After long discussions they came up with a joint information file on 'The Situation of the Kurds in Turkey Today', outlining the suffering of the Kurds and other political activists before and following the 1980 coup and subsequent military government (at that time still in power). The group demanded the abolition of torture and the death penalty, an independent commission for Kurdistan, that the Kurdish problem to be debated in the European Parliament and the United Nations, and that all economical and military aid to Turkey be halted (File, Strasbourg, 15th February 1982). This first visit was accommodated by Herman Verheirstraeten, assistant to Jaak Vandemeulebroecke, in 1980 one of the first Flemish nationalists to be elected to the newly installed executive European Parliament – and joined in 1984 by Willy Kuijpers.

In the European Parliament, particular the European Free Alliance group (EFA), developed out of the initiatives of Coppieters (above) gathered small regionalist and nationalist political parties of different member states. This became an important point of entry. Vandemeulebroecke, one of its architects and follower of Coppieters recalls how the Kurdish support from within the EFA faction came into being:

"I was the president of the European Free Alliance, the EFA, which declared its solidarity with all the peoples within Europe and to all who belonged to minorities. And thus it was evident that the Kurdish question followed that line. First, we stated that there should be solidarity within the European Union, but when I got to know Derwich he tried to convince me of the fact that many other peoples face the same difficulties and that is how

⁸ KKDK: Progressive Democratic Labor organization Kurdistan; KOC-KAK: Kurdish Cultural Organization, KOMKAR: Federation of Kurdish Labor Organizations in West-Germany; *Mala Gelê Kurd*: Kurdish People's House; YXXKF: Federation of Students and Workers of Kurdistan in France; AKSA: Organization of Kurdish Student Movements; KXPK: Progressive Kurdish Student Association in Sweden.

both he and Willy Kuijpers got me involved with the Kurdish problem. At that time we had just a small group of twelve parliament members in the EU, but the advantage was that they all came from different member states or actually minority states within these, the Basques, the Catalans, the Occitans, the Bretons, and so forth. We told every one of them that there should be solidarity and thus that if one of us submitted a resolution everyone should sign and support it. What is more, everyone was responsible to, within his own member state and (national) minority to defend this issue. Thus the Catalans, for example, would feel compelled to pay attention to the Kurdish issue when arguing for their region or within Spain. And thus the issue also returned to the level of the member states and solidarity could increase within Europe. What we did was to assign everyone to find supporters for particular causes amongst their member states' parliamentarians. In that way we were able to multiple the support for certain causes. That was our strategy" (Jaak Vandemeulebroecke, 18 September 2009).

These political strategies resulted in tens of motions for resolutions that in particular sought to condemn Turkey for its violations of the human rights and the rights of its Kurdish minority from the 1980s onwards (Casier 2011). The support for the plight of the Kurds, as well the concerns over Turkey's human rights violations in general would also develop within other parliamentary groups, such as the United Left/Nordic Green Left (GUE-NGL).

In the motions tabled by Flemish MEPs we again see the development of interest in this issue, with the first (1985-87) motions tabled just by Kuijpers and Vandemeulebroucke, who are then joined by Jef Ulburghs (April '87 and '88), and then Sleenckx and Van Dienderen (June 1990), and with the emergence of a focus from the general – for example to defend 'rights to education and culture' (May 1985) – to specific issues, along with Kurdist language and criticism of Turkey – such as in respect of the 'deportation of 1000 villagers from Northwest Kurdistan' (April '87).

The delegations, resolutions and formal submission of questions in (sub)national parliaments and European Parliament and other activities by politicians engaged with the (Turkish) Kurdish issue would continue to remain an important part of the transnational political activities in this area and leverage support for the Kurdish nationalist movement (which still continues). Ferho evaluates these political initiatives as follows:

"It increases the morale, you feel like you've actually achieved something when the other side is put in a difficult place, when its room for maneuver is somewhat more restricted than before. If the political world here is a little more critical, well, that is not making it any easier for the other side. If they learn that the Senate or the Chamber is disapproving of certain things then the Turkish ambassador will have to think twice about what he is going to argue next time he enters a meeting... When we talked about the Kurds in the past, how many politicians were willing to listen? Now we have got many more friends in politics. Similarly for the media. The coverage used to be very biased. The information that was spread about the Kurds was very biased. Now if the media write something,

they'll check how we are considering things and that makes a very big difference" (Derwich Ferho, 17 March 2010).

The receptivity of Flemish politicians for the Kurdish cause is still alive, as testified by the listed activities (see Appendixes). However, the success of this transnational advocacy network depended and continues to depend strongly upon the personal commitments of individual politicians on the one hand, and Kurdish activists on the other. Therefore the future transmission of these engagements is never guaranteed but in continual need of re-enactment.

Conclusion

This paper has aimed to address a lacuna in the literature on transnationalism and Diaspora politics, which is the importance and role of political gatekeepers in transnational political activism. Research rarely engages with the gatekeepers' viewpoints and beliefs underlying their commitment to 'others' causes', nor paid sufficient attention to the 'learning processes' that develop from the alignments and cooperative relationships between transnational political actors and gatekeepers in the receiving states and how these may account for the particular kinds of activities instigated by transnational political actors, as well as the institutionalization processes that might unfold. Equally lacking has been the insight that studies of political gatekeepers could provide into transnational advocacy networks.

Through this genealogy of the relationship and the coming into being of the cooperation between members of the Kurdish nationalist movement and the Flemish nationalist movement, we have been able to show how the various Belgian (and European) activities in support of the Kurds originated. The delegations in particular come to the fore as one of the most effective activities to increase gatekeepers' commitment to the Kurdish nationalist cause. This could be read from the listed resolutions and activities undertaken where people that participated in the delegations to the Southeastern region figured prominently. For these individuals the political became much more personal. Equally important is the fact that the reconstruction of the Flemish-Kurdish nexus provides insight into the significance of the ideological beliefs and the determining roles of the individuals promoting these. These make comprehensible the ongoing openness and support for a cause like that of the (Turkish) Kurds among both the Flemish nationalist politicians in Flanders, and the regionalists and nationalist parties in the European Parliament more generally, irrespective of voter support. It proves that it was and is primarily the strong sense of identification and solidarity with the plight of the rights of peoples that was called to attention and created the fertile ground upon which Kurds' transnational political activism could be built (an identification, calling to attention and transnational activism that is ongoing). And it helps to show also how the Kurdish nationalist discourse has developed in Belgium (and the European Union), and how this issue has played out in the context of internal Belgian (and European) political

discourse. The extent to which the Flemish nationalist parties have also nurtured the dream of federalism and regional political autonomy for the Kurds within the Kurdish nationalist movement – as some gatekeepers would like to believe – is a question for future research. What is clear though is that it is due to political gatekeepers that Kurdish activism in Flanders was able to institutionalize, contribute to a European-wide axis of transnational activities, and become permanently sustained.

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2. The Kurdish Question in European Parliament⁹

It was late summer 2006 and we were sitting on a boat crossing the Bosphorus when a dark-skinned man sitting opposite offered us tea. 'Where are you from?' he asked, launching into conversation. 'We are from Belgium', I uttered in broken Turkish. 'Belgium, Brussels?!', he replied with a smile, 'Belgium is a good country, I know. You have Nelly Maes!' My husband and I were startled. Here we found ourselves having tea with an ordinary Kurdish man in Istanbul who spoke with great respect of a Flemish politician probably unknown to many Belgian citizens. The man went on to recount having seen the former MEP many times on RojTv, the Kurdish satellite television channel broadcasting from Denderleeuw-Brussels – and the senior female politician in question was one of the fiercest defenders of the Kurds' plight in the European Parliament.

(author's observations, Istanbul, September 2006)

Indeed, the European Parliament ('Brussels' or 'Strasbourg') carries a special meaning for millions of Kurds living in Turkey and the Kurdish Diaspora in Europe. Although less enthusiastic than a few years ago, Kurds from Turkey remain among the staunchest supporters of Turkey's accession to the European Union. In particular, politicized Kurds have been hopeful that Turkey's entrance to the Union would create opportunities to solve the Kurdish question. Considerable energy has been devoted in staging demands to the European Institutions, with Kurdish political activists addressing their concerns to the Council of Europe, the European Commission, and the European Parliament as well as to the European Court of Human Rights. This chapter will concentrate on activities in the European Parliament.

The European Parliament (EP) was established as a directly elected body in 1979, and by the 1980s its Members (MEPs) were already raising their concerns about human rights violations in the southeastern, mainly Kurdish-inhabited provinces of Turkey. During the early nineties, MEPs started to call attention to Turkey's Kurdish problem, the Kurdish question per se. In 1995, the president of the Parliament awarded its Sakharov Prize for Freedom of Thought to Leyla Zana, imprisoned MP of the pro-Kurdish DEP Party, in an effort to push forward political change in the country. This gradual development of MEP involvement in the Kurdish question ran alongside Turkey's

⁹ This chapter was published as a book chapter in the edited volume by Casier & Jongerden, 2011, which was released in August 2010: Casier, M. (2011) The Politics of Solidarity. The Kurdish Question in European Parliament. In: *Nationalisms and Politics Turkey: political Islam, Kemalism and the Kurdish issue*. Edited by M. Casier and J. Jongerden, pp. 197-217. New York: Routledge The edited volume was subject to blind peer-review by 3 reviewers.

endeavor to join the EU, which culminated in its acceptance for candidacy in 1999 and the commencement of full accession negotiations in 2005. MEP disquiet regarding the Kurdish question has thus been heightened over the last decade with concern about Turkey's progress towards meeting the political criteria for full accession specified in the 1993 Council at Copenhagen, namely, a "stability of institutions guaranteeing democracy, the rule of law, human rights and respect for and protection of minorities [...]" (Doc. SN 180/193: 7.A.iii). This, of course, is the leverage Kurdish activists have hoped to exploit. A third dynamic here has been the growing power and self-confidence of the European legislature as a relatively accessible, democratic institution, and the increasing range of MEP activities. This, however, must be set against its continued limitation, particularly as regards Turkey and the Kurdish question, insofar as it is other EU bodies (the Council, with the Commission) that deal with the accession of a new state (something that the EP can merely block at the ratification stage, and then only with a majority of the whole vote).

This chapter will look at how MEPs have engaged with the Kurdish question. It will also review the role of Kurdish political activists and their relations to EU member-states (i.e. at the national level), and the importance of this in staging demands at the supranational level of the European Parliament; and it will look at the ways in which Kurdish political activists have assisted representatives of Kurdish political parties to access an international audience directly, through their visits to the European Parliament.¹⁰ Particular attention will be paid to how MEPs have dealt with the presence of the Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK) in their institution. We will see that the support base for Kurdish demands rests with a particular group of politicians who share certain characteristics, and are primarily engaged with the plight of Turkey's Kurds out of solidarity – which proves both its strength and its weakness. Finally, having uncovered

¹⁰ Data for this paper were collected through research of the archives of the European Parliament and European Commission other EU institutions, and through semi-structured interviews in Europe and Turkey with leading members of the main politically active Kurdish associations, members of human rights' organizations, politicians, academics, intellectuals and journalists, as well as with national and European politicians in Western Europe who have engaged themselves with the Kurdish question and thus have to some extent become mediators to certain levels of organization. Further to this, the author joined Kurdish delegations to the European Parliament in Brussels in order to observe their meetings there, and also observed conferences held on the premises of the European Parliament, during the period of autumn 2006 to spring 2009. The interviews and observations were important sources of information on the initiatives of the subjects under study, both those already in progress and those being planned for the future. Researching what could be called a political activist 'elite', for whom it was of strategic importance not to reveal their activities very openly (Aberbach & Rockman 2002), approaching them personally, conducting long conversations with them, and, in particular, observing them in their daily activities provided a form of information that could not be gathered through classical, quantitative surveys. The interviews and the observations, that is, provided insight into the networks and their spatial arenas, the political demands and discourses, and the political activities directed towards members of the European institutions. This paper is thus written from an agency-oriented perspective, which incorporates the ways actors present their problems and develop coalitions (Smith & Bakker 2005).

the realities of Kurdish ‘diplomacy’, some general conclusions and questions will be drawn.¹¹

European Parliament calls for political change in Turkey

From the beginning of the 1980s onwards, Turkey’s internal political situation came under increasing international scrutiny. In EP debates, particular attention was paid to Turkey’s worrying human rights record. The 1980 coup had led to the suspension of the activities of the EU-Turkey Joint Parliamentary Committee, but the coup and its consequences were a divisive issue for the parties in the Parliament (Grojean 2008). The leftist parties in Europe were generally more critical of the heightened political and societal control exercised by the Turkish state and its military, which most affected the leftist political parties, labor unions and Kurdish nationalist parties in Turkey (the extreme right was also affected, but to a lesser extent). Many organizations were closed down and their publications forbidden, and in the years following the coup over a hundred thousand people were jailed (Romano 2006). There were still 80,000 political prisoners even in 1985, two years after the ending of military rule. The 1982 constitution instituted by the army had extended the powers of the president and the National Security Council and restricted the rights of civilians, in particular freedom of speech, which could easily be disregarded on the grounds of threats to public order, national security, the national interest or the Republic. As of 1984, the PKK was at war with the Turkish state, an armed conflict would lead to yet further human rights violations in the country.

In 1985, a report on Turkey’s human rights record was drawn up by MEP rapporteur Richard Balfe for the EP Political Affairs Committee. The first part of this report consisted of a motion to the Parliament for a formal resolution on the matter, stating, in its principle clauses, that the Committee

“Expresses deep concern at the continuing seriousness of the situation with regard to human rights observance in Turkey and strongly condemns all forms of violence against the person practised in that country; Calls on the Turkish Government to move rapidly towards a restoration of human rights in the country.” (Doc. PE 98. 572/fin.: A.1,2).

Particular concerns listed in the main body of the motion included the rights to life, integrity of the person and a fair trial, and an amnesty for prisoners of conscience. In the explanatory statement supplying background information to the motion it was noted that

“Whereas for five years before [the 1980] coup not a single motion for resolution was tabled in the Parliament on human rights in Turkey, since [then] no fewer than 11 resolutions

¹¹ The notion of Turkey’s ‘Kurdish question’ assumed here is that conventionally employed, i.e. without regard to any issues arising from other, related identities (Alevi, Zaza, etc).

expressing concern on the subject have been passed by the Parliament and more than 20 motions for resolution, and numerous oral and written questions have been tabled by Members from many different political groups of both left and right tendencies.” (ibid: B.1.1).

The Balfe report did not address the ethnic dimension of the human rights situation in Turkey in the main body of its motion for a resolution. That no mention there was made of the specific problems Kurdish activists and their families were experiencing indicates that at that time there was still a lack of consensus among MEPs about whether to demand Turkey’s special attention to issues related to the Kurdish question – especially given that both the preamble to the motion and also several of the motions for a resolution mentioned in the report did make such reference, explicitly, including two motions that had been referred to the Committee and were thus appended to the report. The preamble included a clause stating regret that “[...] *widespread violation of the human rights of the Kurdish minority is still occurring in Turkey and, even more so, of those who are politically active as Kurds*” (ibid: A.M); and of the nine appended motions, one was concerned with “*the alarming situation of Kurdish prisoners in Turkey*”, calling for the Turkish government to “*put an end to the violation of the human rights of the Kurdish people*” (Doc. B 2-89/85: 1), while another addressed “*the fate of the Kurdish minority in Turkey*”, protesting ‘strongly’ at their ‘oppression’ (Doc. B 2-63/85: 1).

When, in 1987, Turkey requested membership to the European Economic Community (predecessor of the European Union), the European Parliament voted a resolution over the Armenian genocide that comprised its first unequivocal recognition of the problem in southeast Turkey. Focusing on ‘the question of minorities’, this resolution included a rejection of Turkey’s application that specifically directed attention to the Kurdish issue, thus:

“[T]he refusal by the present Turkish Government to acknowledge the genocide against the Armenian people committed by the Young Turk government, its reluctance to apply the principles of international law to its differences of opinion with Greece, the maintenance of Turkish occupation forces in Cyprus and *the denial of existence of the Kurdish question*, together with the lack of true parliamentary democracy and the failure to respect individual and collective freedoms, in particular freedom of religion, in that country are insurmountable obstacles to consideration of the possibility of Turkey’s accession to the Community...” (Doc. A2-0033/87; 4, emphasis added)¹²

The 1984-89 term of the European Parliament counted a total of twelve resolutions on human rights in Turkey, but none specifically addressing the Kurdish question (Grojean 2008: 176). The Kurdish question thus failed to enter into EU resolutions before the 90s even though it had figured clearly in the motions for resolutions submitted by Members as early as 1984 and was specified in the 1987 Armenia resolution. A significant change

¹² The Commission, meanwhile, postponed any consideration of Turkey’s candidacy in 1989/90, partly on the grounds of its own agenda for integration and partly because of the economic and political situation in Turkey. No specific reference was made to the Kurdish question, but merely general remarks on ‘the human rights situation and... respect for the identity of minorities’ (Doc. SEC (89) 2290: II.9).

took place in the following (1989-1994) legislature, however, as the issue of the Kurdish peoples entered the European consciousness with the genocidal campaigns of Saddam Hussein's regime against the Kurds in northern Iraq, and the Turkish state response to the PKK insurgency and developing guerrilla war in its southeast. A total of sixteen EP resolutions concerning the Kurds were passed during this period, of which five concerned the Kurds from Turkey. A further six resolutions were also passed concerning human rights in Turkey – as the Turkish state responded to the PKK insurgency and developing guerrilla war in its southeast – with five resolutions concerning the Kurds from Turkey, as well as another six concerning human rights generally in Turkey (ibid: 183). In March 1992 the European Parliament condemned Turkey for its use of excessive force following incidents during the Newroz celebrations there, and asked for an international investigation into the oppressive measures taken. Moreover, while criticizing the violence of the PKK, the EP requested that the European Council and the European Commission take the initiative in seeking a negotiated solution to the Kurdish question through the UN, and also that the Turkey-EU Joint Parliamentary Commission discuss the human rights situation in Turkey (Robins 1996 in Grojean 2008: 183).

As concern mounted in Brussels and Strasbourg, for EP (and EU) recognition of the Kurdish question, matters came to a head with the 1994 arrest and detention of Leyla Zana and seven other DEP MPs on the charge of separatism (following the lifting of the parliamentary immunity from criminal prosecution normally enjoyed by MPs in Turkey).¹³ The Public Prosecutor in Ankara had filed a case against Zana and her (then HEP) colleagues following the 1991 inauguration in the Turkish General Assembly, during which Zana, after pledging the oath of loyalty, had added (in Kurdish, itself a criminal offense) that she took the oath 'in the name of fraternity between the Turkish and Kurdish peoples' (*"Ez vê sondê li ser navê gelê kurd û tirk dixwîm"*). Following guilty verdicts (to the changed charge of membership of an armed organization, i.e. the PKK) that led to fifteen year prison sentences for four of the ex-DEP deputies (including Zana), members of the EP Committee of Foreign Affairs decided to take a major step and repeat the response to the 1980 coup, suspending the reunion of the EU-Turkey Joint Parliamentary Committee. It was in this context that the European Parliament made its important symbolic gesture of awarding (the imprisoned) Zana the Sakharov Prize for the Freedom of Speech.¹⁴

¹³ A total of 15 DEP deputies were involved, either arrested to face (various, revised) charges or fleeing the country. See e.g. the press release in Istanbul by the Inter-Parliamentary Union (IPU 1996) – a body of which the EP is an associate member, with some MEPs also being members of their countries' IPU delegations (10 in the 2004-09 term, including 4 who were also in the (sub)committees most pertinent to the Kurdish question).

¹⁴ Leyla Zana has become something of a human litmus test for human rights and the Kurdish question. The first female Kurdish MP in Turkey, and co-founder of the DTP with her three colleagues who had been imprisoned and released at the same time, Zana was again handed a lengthy prison sentence for her words in December 2008 – this time ten years for spreading anti-Turkish terrorist propaganda in her speeches, most notably for referring to PKK leader Abdullah Öcalan as one of the three Kurdish leaders.

Thus it was, in the new climate of recognition (of the Kurdish question), that when Turkey and the EU were negotiating Turkey's entrance into the EU Customs Union in 1996, the European Parliament asked Turkey for progress in solving the issue, along with changes to the 1982 constitution and the anti-terror law, plus improvement of the positions of the detained DEP MPs (Betül Çelik & Rumelili 2002: 7). MEPs even passed a resolution demanding the suspension of the Customs Union negotiations, and the ratification process came close to rejection by the EP specifically because Turkey did not improve the laws related to human rights and the Kurdish problem (managing only some amendments of Article 8 of the Anti-Terror Law). However, the Council of Ministers decided not to follow the EP line, and Turkey duly entered into the Customs Union.

During the same period, the EP passed resolutions demanding, for example, the release of Leyla Zana, imprisoned for *"for championing democracy and recognition of the rights of Kurdish people by peaceful means"* (Doc. B4-0252/97); and it urged Turkey to grant a general amnesty to people jailed under *"laws in conflict with the principles of free speech and human rights"*, end its military operations in the southeast and open negotiations with *"all Kurdish organizations"* for a possible political solution (Doc. B4-0769: 2,3). The EP was also able to flex its political muscles when it, effectively managed to secure from the Commission involvement in the decision-making process for financial aid to Turkey, which was worth hundreds of millions of ECUs (Doc. COM/98/0711: A.b). During the middle part of the 1990s, therefore, the three strands of the story all came together: the EP acquired increased powers following the Maastricht Treaty in 1993 just as the situation in the southeast worsened and Turkey pushed towards the threshold of the EU. Thus the conclusion that the Parliament had now become *"an important player in the relations between Turkey and the EU through its numerous resolutions on Turkish politics"* (Müftüler-Baç 2000: 165).

Concerns over the Turkish state's human rights record and treatment of its Kurdish minority were among the issues that played an important role in the rejection of Turkey's application for EU candidacy during the Luxembourg Summit of the European Council in December 1997 (Betül Çelik & Rumelili 2002). The formal shift from an associational relationship to one of acceptance as a candidate for membership as of 1999 opened many more opportunities for the EU to pressure Turkey for durable political change. Notably, from 1998 onwards, the Commission commenced evaluation of Turkey's bid for membership through regular reports on Turkey's progress towards accession. The EU has never specified its preferred solution to the Kurdish Question, but, the Progress Reports on Turkey have, from the first, called for a political solution¹⁵:

Within a month of the indictment, (two) MEPs had tabled three written questions on the matter, one to the Commission and two to the Council (Doc. Doc. P-6975/08, E-6800/08 & Doc. E-6984/08).

¹⁵ It is the Council of Ministers that decides upon accession of a member-state, requiring a unanimous vote, after consultation with the European Commission and a majority vote in favor from the European Parliament. According to Tocci – and to the frustration of many a Kurdish political activist – the EU

“Turkey will have to find a political and non-military solution to the problem of the south-east. The largely military response seen so far is costly in human and financial terms and is hampering the region's social and economic development. It has also damaged Turkey's international image. A civil solution could include recognition of certain forms of Kurdish cultural identity and greater tolerance of the ways of expressing that identity, provided it does not advocate separatism or terrorism.” (Doc. COM/98/0711: B.1.2).

Kurdish activism in the European Parliament

The Commission would arguably never have taken the strong position it has were it not for the history of EP calls for political change in Turkey vis-à-vis its Kurdish question – but these calls are not to be seen as spontaneous demonstrations of support for the plight of the Kurdish people in Turkey. Without the lobbying activities of the European Kurdish Diaspora, there would probably have been little to document. In this section, we will focus on the role of Kurdish political activists and pro-Kurdish EP parties in the staging of Kurdish demands in European Parliament.

Kurdish activists consider Turkey's long-time relationship with the EU in general and the current EU-Turkey accession negotiation period in particular as offering the brokers of Kurdish organizations and parties their best bargaining position from which to realize change at home. Lobbying activities are currently being directed towards members of the European Parliament, members of the Council of Europe and, to a lesser extent, towards members of the European Commission. Additionally, the legislative and judiciary bodies in Turkey are influenced indirectly by Turkey's many convictions on charges of human rights violations by the European Court of Human Rights – convictions that increase the legitimacy of the demands being made by Kurdish lobbyists and facilitate the advancement of claims regarding Turkey's policies towards its Kurdish minority (Casier 2010). We confine ourselves here to the European Parliament as a political space in which Kurdish political activists operate.

Either as accredited EP lobbyists or as press card holders, several Kurdish political activists now hold special entry cards that allow them to walk freely in and out of the European Parliament without the need for personal invitations from MEPs. This allows the activists to visit MEPs regularly in order to update them on developments within

prescriptive steps for dealing with the Kurdish question have remained extremely vague and open-ended. In fact, however, the EU has spelled out precise guidelines on a wide range of issues relevant to the Kurdish question, through timetabled priorities spelled out in the Turkey Accession Partnership developed over the last decade by the Commission, including detailed, short-term political goals (see: Doc. 2008/157/EC). A subsection on ‘The situation in the East and in the Southeast’ prioritizes needs to ‘abolish the village guard system’ and ‘clear the area of landmines’; and a subsection on ‘Internally displaced persons’ requires the state to facilitate their ‘return... to their original settlements’ and ensure ‘compensation of losses due to terrorism and the fight against terrorism’ (Doc. 2008/157/EC: Annex 3.1).

Turkey and request initiatives, such as writing resolutions for amendments on the progress reports, forwarding written questions to the European Enlargement Commissioner, writing letters of concern to Turkish Ministers, and requesting joint organization of (press) conferences on EP premises.¹⁶ MEPs have also, upon request, taken part in delegations to Turkey in order to observe elections, the Newroz celebrations, and trials of politicians, labor unionists, journalists and writers. Delegations to important events and trials function as a semi-formal 'international monitoring' of Turkey's internal affairs, and, in some cases, help to attract media attention and raise public awareness, both in Europe and in Turkey itself.¹⁷ They also contribute to an increased legitimacy of those individuals who are prosecuted, and are intended to discourage the prosecution of others in similar cases. MEPs have shown particular concern when parts of speeches given by Kurdish politicians inside the European Parliament have been incorporated in the indictments, as was the case for Leyla Zana.¹⁸

Making use of the political means of the MEPs

The European Parliament presents its opinions through the use of resolutions (as demonstrated, above). It passes yearly resolutions regarding Turkey's progress, incorporating reference to the regular reports of the Commission, as well as to other resolutions passed by the Parliament, reports of the Parliament's committees and decisions of the European Council. These regular resolutions on Turkey's progress toward accession (commonly referred to as 'progress reports') have become the main instrument through which the EP has addressed issues related to the Kurdish issue in recent years, and through which amendments to the Commission reports are requested. MEPs also forward written or oral questions to the members of the European Commission and the European Council.

In this work, the EP is given structure by its Political Groups, which unite the national parties and independent MEPs along lines of political orientation. Certain of the EP Political Groups host conferences on issues related to Turkey's accession, with particular attention given to the Kurdish question. The groups that have most actively supported the plight of Turkey's Kurds thus far, notwithstanding their relatively small size, have been the Confederal Group of the European United Left (*Gauche Unitaire Européen*) /

¹⁶ The alacrity of the response to the recent Zana case would be a case in point.

¹⁷ E.g. 2004 EP Turkey Rapporteur Camiel Eurlings made a fact-finding tour to Diyarbakir immediately prior to a top level meeting with, among others, Foreign Minister Abdullah Gul (Doc. PE 342.075).

¹⁸ In 1996, when the EU-Turkey Joint Parliamentary Committee had reconvened in Ankara following its suspension in protest at the trial of the DEP MPs, the meeting was 'overshadowed' by the refusal of the Turkish authorities to allow the delegation to visit Leyla Zana in prison.

Nordic Green Left (GUE/NGL) and the Greens / European Free Alliance (Greens/EFA).¹⁹ The GUE/NGL houses communist and socialist parties (seventeen at present), including the German PDS/die Linke, the Italian and French communist parties, and the Irish Sinn Féin. The EFA is made up of regionalists and democratic nationalists, with MEPs (currently) from Scotland, Wales, the Basque Country, Romania and Latvia who advance the cause of Europe's stateless nations, regions and disadvantaged minorities.

Most of the political parties (and independents) aligned with the GUE/NGL and Greens/EFA groups support Turkey's accession to the European Union, on condition that Turkey lives up to the Copenhagen criteria. The GUE/NGL, which lists support of human rights and cultural diversity among its fourteen Policy Issues, tabled two of its nine resolution motions in the first three months of its existence (in the new Parliament of 1999) in solidarity with the Kurdish cause in Turkey.²⁰ The Greens/EFA group, which includes an emphasis on human rights and on solidarity in its five main aims, has performed such acts as organizing a belated (2004) reception in honor of Leyla Zana, when she was released from prison.²¹ Among the Green parties, MEPs from the Dutch, German, and Belgian Green parties in particular have been engaged with issues related to Turkey's Kurdish question.

MEPs serve as members of committees. For Turkey, the Foreign Affairs Committee, and its subcommittees on Human Rights and on Security and Defense, along with the Committee of Women's rights and Gender Equality are probably the most important ones. The MEPs in the GUE/NGL and Greens/EFA groups most actively involved on the Kurdish question hold (or have held) seats on these committees. Some MEPs are also (have also been) members of the European Delegation to the EU-Turkey Joint Parliamentary Committee, headed (in the legislature of 2004-09) by the Dutch Green

¹⁹ The GUE/NGL group was established in its current format in 1995 and has had 30-50 MEPs. The Greens alone, and in alliance with the EFA since 1999, have also numbered 30-50 MEPs since the mid 90s. The combined total of these two groups has therefore never amounted to much more than 10% of all MEPs.

²⁰ The first motion, on 'the Öcalan case', referred to 'the Kurdish people's right to self-determination', while the second, on 'relations between the European Union and Turkey', criticized Turkey's military approach (Doc. B5-0012/99: 4; Doc. B5-135-99: 4). See: <http://www.guengl.eu>

By way of a note on EP politics in respect of the Kurdish question, the second motion became sidelined as a joint motion – replacing individual Group motions tabled by the (center-right) EPP, (center-liberal) ADLE, (center-left) PSE and Greens/ELA – was adopted as the final EP Turkey text adopted for 1999; the relevant clause (9) of this final text responded to Turkey's positive moves rather than criticizing its failures, thereby following the softer tone and substance of the earlier motions by the larger, less radical blocs – ADLE (cl.5), EPP (cl.10) and (especially) PSE (cl.7) – and jettisoning the more strident wording of the Greens/EFA (and GUE/NGL) (see B5-0140/99}RC1.rev). At the individual level, however, while the strongest language of the preceding (three-hour) came from a (Greek) GUE/NGL MEP, Efstratios Korakas (who referred to 'the Turkish regime... enacting genocides on Kurdish people'), the next harshest came from a (British) ALDE Member (with a Turkish and Kurdish constituency) going against her own Group, MEP Sarah Ludford: e.g. 'The main cancer in the Turkish system is the repression of the Kurdish people.' (<http://www.europarl.europa.eu/sides/getDoc.do?type=CRE&reference=19991006&secondRef=ITEM-001&format=XML&language=EN>).

²¹ See: <http://www.greens-efa.org>

Party MEP, Joost Lagendijk.²² MEPs also come together on the basis of specific themes or topics through 'intergroups', often informal and loose associations. There is an intergroup, 'Friends of the Kurds', (until spring 2009) coordinated by Vittorio Agnoletto, GUE/NGL MEP for the Italian Communist Party.²³

MEPs, the committees and the delegations, we might also note, might themselves be influenced, directly or otherwise, by the EP administrators, from whom input is regularly requested and who can easily switch between EU institutions. Michael Rupp, for example, worked at the EP Secretariat, going to Ankara with the Human Rights subcommittee delegation, before moving to the Commission's Directorate General for Enlargement. Rupp summarized the Commission's proposed Accession Partnership (2005) for the Human Rights subcommittee, drawing attention to the emphasis on political criteria (under which matters such as human rights are subsumed), interpreting the compensation issue (related to war/terrorism related losses) to be essentially a general problem with the functioning of compensation law in Turkey, and advising that the EP encourage the Council to adopt the proposed Accession Partnership 'as soon as possible'.²⁴

Even though many MEPs, particularly members of the groups and committees mentioned, are openly concerned about human rights and the rights of minorities, many of the activities in European Parliament that address the Kurdish question in Turkey, or related problems with Turkey's (dis)respect of Human Rights would not have occurred without the instigation and support of the many Kurdish political activists active at the national and regional levels of the member-states and behind the scenes at the European institutions. In the following section we will look at the origins of EP party involvement in the staging of Kurdish demands and the initiatives taken.

Regional and national activism and its translation to the European Parliament

The different migration waves from Turkey to Western Europe were accompanied by the political organization of the new immigrant communities. Turkish, Kurdish, Alevi and other associations were established and then politicized with the arrival of members of political parties from Turkey and political refugees (Argun 2003, Grojean 2008). These communities and associations formed the base of agitation and mobilization informing MEPs who had their own sympathies to the Kurdish plight, and which eventually translated into EP motions for resolutions. The development of MEP support for the Kurds in Belgium exemplifies this.

²² At the request of the EP Subcommittee on Human Rights, the Joint Parliamentary Committee has also dealt with specific cases of alleged human rights violations in Turkey since 1989,

²³ Agnoletto tabled two of the three quickly tabled questions regarding the latest Zana case.

²⁴ At: http://www.europarl.europa.eu/meetdocs/2004_2009/documents/fd/d-tr20051123_09/d-tr20051123_09en.pdf

In the first section of this paper, we recalled the first motions for resolutions during the 1980s that made explicit reference to the plight of Kurds in Turkey and called upon the Turkish government to take action. The MEPs who submitted the motion on the fate of the Kurdish minority in Turkey mentioned above as appended to the Balfe report (Doc. B 2-63/85) – which explicitly referred to the prosecution and death sentences of Kurdish militants by the Diyarbakir special court – were Willy Kuijpers and Jaak Vandemeulebroecke, two Belgian MEPs from the *Volksunie* or People's Union, the main Flemish nationalist party at that time. Paul Staes, MEP for the Flemish Green Party *Agalev*, in an earlier motion had written that “[...]every possible attempt has been made to impose Turkish culture on the Kurdish area, with the population of this south-eastern part of the country being forbidden to speak their own language” (Doc. 2-595/84). Three motions were submitted by members of the Belgian Socialist Party: Marijke Van Hemeldonck, Anne-Marie Lizin and Jef Ulburghs (Docs. 2-556/84, 2-1521/84 and B 2-89/85). The motion for a resolution submitted by Jef Ulburghs was the other motion referred to as appended to the Balfe report. Like Kuijpers/Vandemeulebroecke, Ulburghs also made reference to the Diyarbakir special court trials (and to the PKK, by name) as well as to other matters related to court rulings and prison conditions in the region – including, for example, the ‘degrading practices’ carried out against Kurdish prisoners in the Diyarbakir Military Court –and, more generally, to ‘the growing repression of the Kurdish people’ and their right to ‘their own cultural and linguistic identity’.

Unsurprisingly perhaps, the Belgian MEPs who tabled the motions directly addressing the Kurds as a people included Flemish nationalists, generally concerned about the fate of stateless people and proclaiming people's right to self-determination. However, more was needed to convert this concern into a real engagement with the Kurdish question. Within the *Volksunie*, the youth wing was actively engaged with the Kurdish issue by the end of the 1970s. One of the important figures in these circles was Derwich Ferho, who had arrived in Belgium as a (Kurdish) political refugee (from Turkey) and was taken under the wings of MEP Willy Kuijpers. Derwich Ferho established Tekoşer in 1978, the Kurdish Workers and Students' Association of Belgium, later to become the Kurdish Institute of Brussels. Assistant to Kuijpers and Vandemeulebroecke in the European Parliament was Bart Staes, Flemish nationalist and pacifist, who went on to become MEP for the Flemish Green Party. Thus, from the end of the 1970s onwards, relations were established between the Kurdish Institute of Brussels and Flemish politicians (relations still extant today). Whereas the aforementioned MEPs were actively raising their concerns in the 1980s, by the 1990s MEPs Bart Staes and Nelly Maes were the main figures addressing the Kurdish issue in Flanders and the European Parliament.

When a split occurred in the *Volksunie* party and MEP Staes moved to the Greens, he continued to engage with the Kurdish issue, even though it was of little concern to his voters. Upon the suggestion of the Kurdish institute and other associations, tens of written questions were submitted by Staes following the commencement of the accession negotiations with Turkey. MEP Nelly Maes, the senior politician so well

remembered by the man on the boat on the Bosphorus, recalled how difficult it was, back in the 1990s, to get the word 'Kurdish' accepted into the resolutions by the Parliament (personal interview 17 July 2007). Nelly Maes was (and still is) president of the European Free Alliance, which hosted the main activities surrounding the Kurdish issue at that time. The EFA brought together about forty MEPs, who then individually lobbied within their own political parties for the support of resolutions or other actions. The relationship between the Kurdish institute and the *Volksunie* (and its later split-offs) shows the importance of the awareness raising activities of Kurdish activists within political parties at regional and national levels in order for the Kurdish issue to get addressed at the European level. This example holds not just for Belgium, but for France, Italy and Great Britain also – and especially for Germany.

With its developing politicization and effective (primarily PKK) organization (through associations, publications, activism, etc), the growing constituency of Kurds in Germany was able to win attention from the major political parties there, primarily the Social Democrat PDS (Partei des Demokratischen Sozialismus) and the Greens. German Kurds even managed to gain direct representation through these parties at the European level when Feleknas Uca, a young Kurdish Yezidi woman, became the sole MEP of Kurdish origin in 1999, with the help of German Kurds supporting her party, the PDS.²⁵

The PDS had been very actively involved in Turkey's Kurdish Question long before Uca was elected to the European Parliament (Østergaard-Nielsen 2003, Eccarius-Kelly 2002). In fact, the Kurdish question had been a hotly debated topic in the German *Bundestag* (parliament) since the 1980s, with the PDS as well as the German Green Party actively involved with the issue. In 1983, the two parties demanded a halt to the financial and military support given to Turkey, and in 1984 they argued that a war was being fought against the Kurdish people (Grojean 2008). While German politics became divided over the PKK and its status during the 1990s, the PDS held firm as the party that refused to brand the PKK with the label of 'terrorist'. Instead, it demanded an end to the expulsion of Kurdish asylum seekers back to Turkey and a termination of the military and police cooperation between Germany and Turkey, and accused the government of complicity in genocide against the Kurds (Grojean 2008). Thus it was that the PDS became the political advocate of the PKK related associations in Germany (Grojean 2008) and later in the European Parliament (in the GUE/NGL Group).

²⁵ Just 22 when elected, German born Uca was the only female Yezdidi MP worldwide until the 2005 Iraq election. She served two terms (1999-2009 was a member of the Turkey-European Union Joint Parliamentary Committee and substitute member of the Human Rights Subcommittee as well as the Women's' Rights and Gender Equality Committee). One of Uca's first acts as an MEP was to put her name to the GUE/NGL resolution on Öcalan (in footnote above), while the photos featured on her website homepage include one of her with Leyla Zana, and another of her at a Newroz rally in Diyarbakir sharing the stage with the (ex-)HADEP leader Murat Bozlak and the HADEP city mayor.

In the service of Kurdish politicians: homeland politics

These days, European based Kurdish political activists often provide assistance to representatives of the pro-Kurdish DTP (*Demokratik Toplum Partisi*, the Democratic Society Party, successor to DEHAP/HADEP/DEP/HEP)²⁶ Flown over from Turkey, DTP representatives address MEPs on specific problems of their party and their constituents, Turkey's (lack of) reforms, and the need for a political solution to the Kurdish question. From 2004 until 2007 in particular, DTP mayors, such as Osman Baydemir, mayor of Diyarbakir (the most populous city in the Turkish southeast and unofficial Kurdish capital of the region), and Abdullah Demirbaş of Diyarbakir's Sur municipality paid visits to MEPs (Casier 2010), to discuss the international role of the region's mayors (see also Watts 2006).

Since the 2007 election of DTP representatives into Turkey's General Assembly, MPs from the region have also been paying regular visits to European Parliament. They are assisted by their DTP Brussels representative, who is supported by members of *Kongreya Netewiyê Kurdistanê*, KNK (the Kurdistan National Congress) – which unites several Kurdish parties from the different parts of Kurdistan but is mainly dominated by the PKK – along with the Kurdish Institute of Brussels and other Kurdish associations. DTP mayors and MPs not only engage in personal meetings with MEPs who are potential supporters of their demands, but also take part in the conferences and press conferences hosted by the parliament. These EP visits are often combined with visits to national and local politicians in different EU-member states and to Kurdish associations in different European countries with Kurdish populations, in order to rally for political support.

Conferences on the premises

Conferences in the European Parliament related to the Kurdish question are organized at the level of the Groups. Since 2004, the GUE/NGL Group has hosted the annual 'International Conference on the EU, Turkey and the Kurds', as well as the commemorative conference, 'Dersim 1937-1938: 70 Years After', on the massacres committed in putting down the Dersim rebellion of 1937. In March 2008, the ALDE, PSE and Greens/EFA Groups combined to organize a conference on the new Turkish civil constitution and the Kurdish question. The biggest of these conferences however is the International Conference, which is organized by the European Turkey Civic Commission (EUTCC). This body, whose advisory council has a membership overlapping with that of the GUE/NGL Group, was founded by the London-based Kurdish Human Rights Project (KHRP), the Norwegian Rafto Foundation, the Germany-based Medico International and the Bar Human Rights Committee of England and Wales. The intention in establishing the EUTCC was to monitor the accession process, with a particular concern for human

²⁶ Ahmet Türk, current leader of the DTP was one of the DEP MPs arrested in 1994 (i.e. with Leyla Zana).

rights and the rights of minorities in Turkey, especially the ‘festering sore’ of the Kurdish question.²⁷

In order to affect opinion formation amongst MEPs, the International Conference on the EU, Turkey and the Kurds is mostly held shortly after the publication of the European Commission’s annual progress report and thus during the period in which the Parliament is in preparation of its draft resolution over the progress report. Different years of the conference have brought together DTP politicians, members of human rights and women’s NGOs from Turkey, Turkish and Kurdish intellectuals and opinion makers, members of the KNK, lawyers of imprisoned PKK’ leader Abdullah Öcalan, members of the Turkey Peace Assembly, European academics, and members of European Parliament. The aim of the conference is to reflect upon the accession negotiations, but addressing primarily the Kurdish question and the need for a political solution. Every year, conference participants make calls upon the EP and the EU as a whole to take a firm stance on Turkey’s lack of reform and take up the role of broker in the conflict.

Whereas MEPs supportive of the Kurdish cause are present on the panels, the conference room has mostly been occupied by members of Kurdish associations, activist journalists engaged in the Kurdish print and online media, and members of NGOs. The conference is covered by the Kurdish satellite station ROJ-TV, broadcasting from Denderleeuw-Brussels. News coverage in the Turkish press, on the other hand, is very limited, and TV coverage in the EU member-states close to non-existent. The conference thus appears to contribute first and foremost to an internal solidarity amongst Kurdish political activists and supporters. It also creates opportunities for Kurdish activists and Kurdish politicians, based in Turkey and Europe to engage with one another and to strengthen ties. Thus, not surprisingly, the conference attracts Kurdish activists from all over Europe and even some members of the Kurdish Diaspora in the USA, as it is an opportunity to be amongst people of like-mind, critical of the Turkish state and its institutions, and to meet with old friends, some of which have not seen each other since they fled Turkey at the time of 1971 or 1980 coups or during the heated 1990s.

In Turkey the annual EUTCC event is perceived as a ‘PKK-conference’, which has led to hesitation amongst Turkish academics as to whether or not to accept invitations. And while Turkish NGOs are represented, members of Turkish political parties other than the DTP have shown no willingness to attend the conference. The result is a tendency for Kurdish nationalists to be talking to Kurdish nationalists. Similarly, a March 2008 conference hosted by the ALDE, PSE and Greens/EFA groups was also unable to bring the sides together. Focused on the theme of the need for a new civilian constitution for

²⁷ See: <http://www.eutcc.org>

EUTCC patrons include Desmon Tutu, Shirin Ebadi and Noam Chomsky, as well as Yaşar Kemal and Leyla Zana – who addressed the 1999 International Conference, along with the EP Vice President, Italian MEP (GUE/NGL) and human rights subcommittee member Luisa Morganti.

See: <http://www.khrp.org/content/view/439/1/>

Turkey and how this could contribute to a solution of the Kurdish question, this conference failed to attract representatives of Turkish parties despite gathering all the main Kurdish nationalist parties from Turkey (e.g. HAK-PAR and KA-DEP), and thus not solely the DTP), together with the importance of the topic and the increased legitimacy conferred by an opening address from Enlargement Commissioner Ollie Rehn, and was disregarded in Turkey.

To be or not to be PKK

The best organized network of politically oriented Kurdish groups in Europe is the umbrella of PKK-related organizations, which managed to homogenize the Kurdish diaspora after the marginalization of its main competitor in Turkey and Europe, Kemal Burkay's *Partiya Socialist Kurda*, PSK (Socialist Party of Kurdistan) (Grojean 2008). Unsurprisingly, these organizations are also very present in what could be called the 'Kurdish diplomacy', the lobbying of national and European MPs. The openness of a number of MEPs to PKK-related organizations and politicians is peculiar. It has been argued that European politicians do not recognize the PKK, despite the longtime objective of the PKK itself to establish international recognition (Grojean 2008: 171). The realities on the ground, however, are ambiguous. Members of the European Parliament do make time to receive political activists and are sometimes willing to take certain actions that support their cause, but they never openly support the PKK *as such*. Indeed, the 'keeping up appearances' appears to be mutual, with the PKK discussed in the 'third person' as if it is an entity outside of the meeting rooms. Political activists do not present themselves as militants of the PKK, and politicians, although often aware of the fact that they are most probably facing a militant, go along with the game. For them it is less costly to pretend to ignorance about the true identity of their discussion partners, especially given the fact that the PKK figures on the US' international list of terrorist organizations, endorsed by the EU.

By engaging with Kurdish political activists, who clearly have strong affiliations with the PKK, present the demands of the movement, and address developments in Turkey from that very perspective, using its rhetoric, MEPs (as well as politicians at other levels within the member states) clearly show their recognition of and support for at least some of the goals of the Kurdish national movement. Nevertheless, while the demands might be seen as rightful and legitimate, MEPs do not want to (be seen to) legitimize the PKK's leading role in formulating and presenting them. There is no *public* acknowledgement of the PKK as the main representative of Kurds from Turkey, far less as the major political force that they undoubtedly are. This serves to confirm the international public image of the PKK as no more than an armed guerrilla / terrorist organization and prevent recognition of it as, at the same time, a social movement enjoying considerable popular support (Eccarius-Kelly 2002, Romano 2006). Such

recognition would, of course, counteract the one-sided attention drawn by the Turkish state, both internally and externally, to the violent acts ('terrorist' activities) of the PKK.

MEPs have tended to echo the Turkish demand that the DTP declare the PKK a terrorist organization, and challenged the legal party over its relationship with its outlawed cousin on many occasions.²⁸ Many of the participants on the panels at the yearly EUTCC organized conference have resisted this, however, and instead insisted on the inclusion of the PKK as a political actor, arguing that requiring the DTP to distance itself from the PKK amounts to asking the DTP to distance itself from the Kurdish people. At the 4th International Conference, in December 2007, for example, the restoration of the legitimacy of the PKK appeared as one of the most central issues. Joost Lagendijk (Dutch Green head of the European Delegation to the EU-Turkey Joint Parliamentary Committee) argued that

"Political actors need freedom to move, but this is hindered by the actions of the PKK. We strongly support the DTP in finding a political solution. It is not with parties like CHP that we are going to find a solution... If you close down the DTP, you strengthen the hardliners amongst Kurds and Turks. The PKK has to stop its actions without any conditions. The DTP is now the victim of the PKK. The Turkish government needs to advance its reforms. It should not allow them to be hijacked by the PKK. The DTP has to say that it does not agree with the actions of the PKK. It is necessary to enervate those who think that violence can bring a solution." (personal conference notes of the EUTCC-Conference of 3-4 December 2007)

Lagendijk found himself to be one of the few 'dissidents' in the room, however, with the Kurdish National Congress (KNK) representatives making disapproving noises in the background while he was speaking and then refusing to applaud when he finished. By contrast, DTP president and Turkish MP Ahmet Türk received a standing ovation for his reply:

"Maybe you think of the PKK as a terrorist organization, but if you leave it out (of the negotiations) than you are not being realistic. The PKK needs to be democratically incorporated." (personal conference notes of the EUTCC-Conference of 3-4 December 2007)

Members of the DTP have shown particular caution not to be too open about their relationships with the PKK. Many MEPs have shown their sympathy for DTP members and their predecessors, and would like to believe that the DTP is a political party and the PKK an armed movement, that the two are very different entities – a distinction which allows the European parliamentarians to more easily support their Turkish-Kurdish counterparts. In fact, of course, the DTP and PKK are probably better described as two wings of a single movement, and were the exact nature of the relations to be more openly revealed, the harder it would be for those MEPs to continue to support the political representatives. For its part, the DTP depends on the support derived from the

²⁸ E.g. in the resolution on the latest Progress Report (March 2009), the EP *"Urges the DTP and all its elected members to distance themselves clearly from the terrorist PKK"* (Doc. B6-0105/2008: 20).

organizational structure of the PKK and its supporters (through the use of its media, mobilization by its militants, ...), while at the same time being in need of support from Europe (which means MEPs, at least initially) as the party members continuously face judicial investigations and trials, and the closure of the party (like that of its predecessors). Therefore, the DTP it chooses to present itself in the European Parliament as a party that could be a broker between the PKK and the Turkish authorities. In short, it has been sending out different messages, compromising by observing the need to distance itself from the PKK, but always attesting to the importance of considering the PKK as a political actor, and yet at the same time defending the demand for a non-violent solution.

Some MEPs dislike the PKK and its use of armed struggle, but are still open to meeting its representatives (directly, without DTP mediation) as they consider this to offer an opportunity to pass on messages, particularly (and continuously) calling on the 'party' to refrain from the use of violent means.

The support that is given to Turkey's fight against terrorism in the various statements, progress reports and resolutions emanating from the EU, including the EP, is seen by members of Kurdish organizations as belittling the problems of the Kurds in Turkey. It leads them to judge European politicians as having a 'statist mindset', in accordance with the statist approach they find in the Turkish authorities. Since Öcalan's capture in 1999, the PKK itself has tried to shed its violent image and present itself as a peaceful political movement. With the announcement of a (unilateral) ceasefire following the new (non-separatist) direction outlined from prison by Öcalan, clashes have been explained as matters of self-defense and occasional bomb blasts in cities in the west of Turkey attributed to splinter organizations 'no longer under its control'. One of the means intended to increase the legitimacy of the PKK was a 2006 petition that gathered over 3 million signatures from Kurds living in Turkey, Iran, Iraq, Syria, and the diaspora stating that they considered Abdullah Öcalan to be their representative leader – the petition was presented at a press conference held, on September 12 of that year, in the European Parliament.

Taken as a whole, this mix of rhetoric and ambiguity, meetings direct and implicit, and clear initiatives show that a large part of the lobbying work of the European Parliament by Kurdish organizations and other groups and individuals is particularly directed at the creation of a political space which is inclusive of the PKK, and thus devoted to the survival and strengthening of the position of the party and its leader. This has been severely criticized by Kurdish political activists who operate independently of the PKK and are consequently marginalized (personal interviews, Winter 2008).

Assessing the political activities in the European Parliament

This exploration of the initiatives taken by MEPs and the background lobbying work of the Kurdish political activists can be assessed as demonstrating four main points. Firstly it shows that the European Parliament offers a range of opportunities to raise concerns about the political situation in Turkey, and in particular the human rights situation in the southeast and for Kurds generally. Moreover, the EP has shown itself to be a political space accessible to Kurdish political activists even if their party figures on the EU list of organizations deemed to be involved in terrorism. Within the European Parliament, Kurdish activists have always found allies to voice their cause, particularly among parties with which there were already working relations at the regional and national levels and/or with which they are ideologically aligned (including parties with a particular concern for the rights of national minorities). Notwithstanding this support and the significant number of activities, however, the weight of this politics of solidarity has been relative. Many motions have been tabled and resolutions recorded, but the European Commission has always maintained its own policy regarding the way in which it addresses issues related to the Kurdish question with the Turkish government and its administration – notwithstanding some well publicized instances in which EP views have found their way into Commission documents (see Casier 2010). An overall assessment here would probably be that the European Parliament has contributed to the fact that the Kurdish question has found its way to and remained high on the political agenda.

Secondly, the opening of this chapter noted the attention drawn from the Kurdish media: most of the public activities in the European Parliament addressing the Kurdish cause have figured widely on Kurdish websites, been well covered in Kurdish newspapers and enjoyed plenty of broadcasting time on Kurdish satellite stations. The coverage of EP initiatives, and particularly the presence of famous Kurdish personalities on its premises, contributes to an expanding Kurdish public sphere, one that transcends the boundaries of the Turkish state and reaches into the Kurdish diaspora spread across Europe, the Caucasus and the United States, thereby contributing to an increasingly transnational image of the Kurdish nation. On the other hand, the initiatives have seldom managed to attract attention outside of Kurdish circles. Similarly, in the conferences and seminars one finds oneself amongst politically engaged Kurds listening to their brethren, and – as an outsider – left wondering when they will run tired of listening to the repetition of their own demands. EP activities have also been unable to raise much concern from the European public, as what is happening inside the Parliament rarely attracts attention from the national media in the member-states, and Europe still lacks a European public sphere (Balibar 2001).

Thirdly, especially interesting have been the repeated efforts – through petitions, conferences, and visits – to reinforce the legitimacy of the main Kurdish political actor, the PKK. However, these efforts have enjoyed only limited support within the EP itself. When Kurdish mayors or members of Parliament for the DTP pay visits to the EP they

are confronted with the very same issue that they face in Turkey, which is the need to distance themselves openly from the PKK. Many MEPs still show a willingness to talk to members of PKK-related organizations, but without granting the public recognition that could have them branded as supporters of a terrorist organization. The existence of the terrorist list creates risks for representatives of the PKK to openly identify themselves, as this could lead to prosecutions and arrests. Turkish authorities and Turkish media, meanwhile, express continual indignation at the fact that a number of people against which national and international warrants of arrest are running have been able to walk freely in and out of the buildings of the EU institutions.

Fourthly, the continuous support of the GUE/NGL Group has been a source of strength, as it allowed the Kurdish political activist to have nearly unconditional access to the European Parliament to host different kinds of initiatives. Indeed, GUE/NGL MEPs have generally denounced the classification of the PKK as a terrorist organization, and they were the sole group that registered its objection to the listing when it was officially endorsed by an EP vote. Nevertheless, GUE/NGL Group support might also have contributed to a marginalization of the Kurdish question within the European Parliament. Over time, the Kurdish question has come to be seen as something of a GUE/NGL issue instead of as a subject that could win endorsement from MEPs across the board, and less efforts have been made to actively seek the support of MEPs in groups in which there is less consensus over whether or not to engage with this kind of political hot issue. There has been a tendency to fall back upon what activists themselves jokingly call 'the usual suspects', which makes it harder to reach out beyond this circle of politicians. There is still occasional support of Green and EFA MEPs, but this group and the GUE/NGL are among the smaller EP groups, representing small national parties that still have little say at either the national or supranational level. Observations by this author of the conferences organized and their panel discussions, moreover, suggest a lack of openness towards critical voices, which over time surely must discourage politicians to engage further with what the activists call 'their struggle'. There is an introversion, a sense of a space only for the already converted. People that have voiced criticisms openly, meet increased suspicion and are often not to be seen again the following year. A clear example of this was the reception afforded to MEP Joost Lagendijk (above). This lack of tolerance for critique leads to narrowing circles of support and erodes the credibility of the Kurdish activists' repeated calls for 'democratization' along with the self-representation of the Kurdish movement as the vanguard of Turkey's democratization in general.

Conclusion

The European Parliament has shown itself to be increasingly vocal regarding Turkey's Kurdish question since the 1980s. The criticisms voiced at the European level by MEPs reflect the concerns of Kurdish political activists and pro-Kurdish parties, who have

developed networks of support in the EU-member states. Additionally, MEPs are addressed directly by Kurdish political activists and DTP mayors and MPs from Turkey. The main instrument through which MEPs have tried to influence EU involvement in Turkey's internal political affairs has been through the use of resolutions. However, the effect of the resolutions should not be exaggerated, as the main author of the accession negotiations is the European Commission. For example, EP resolutions on the EC reports can merely 'adjust' parts of the existing texts. The EP may be a 'player', but it has not been dealt a very strong hand. Moreover, the Turkish government and the administration have shown an increased reluctance to engage more seriously with the reforms of late, and many of EC demands remained unimplemented.

We have argued that, the Kurdish issue would probably not have been addressed as it has been were it not for the political engagement of members of the Kurdish diaspora, and their cooperation with Kurdish politicians from Turkey. Kurdish political activists and politicians try to affect EP resolutions and opinion making through numerous personal visits to MEPs of different Political Groups and the organization of conferences and press conferences. They find particular solidarity and support in this from the GUE/NGL Group – which although invaluable, might also be preventing a more active dialogue with other, more powerful EP groups (e.g. ALDE). This is compounded by the fact that the support from EP Members/parties/groups depends upon their relationships with parties at national level, i.e. in the member-states: the smaller EP Groups tend to represent smaller national parties, which consequently have less political weight in general, including, for example, with the Commission).

In addressing the content of the activities, we see that discussions taking place within Turkey continue on the premises of the European Parliament – such as the debate about whether or not the DTP should distance itself from the PKK. The opportunity allowed by (in) the Parliament for PKK-related organizations to be influential is particularly interesting, as it testifies to a clear – although not publicly attested – engagement with what is officially considered to be a terrorist organization. Many of the activities in the European Parliament over recent last years have specifically aimed at restoring the legitimacy of this movement, but with limited results thus far. This brings up questions over the future role of the Parliament in the resolution of the Kurdish question. Amongst activists there seems to be a growing fatigue, due to the absence of strong interest in their cause and the lack of serious reforms in Turkey since 2005. In the European Parliament itself, it is unclear whether we will see an ongoing, high level of engagement with the Kurdish question. As the support for initiatives in the EP addressing problems related to the Kurdish question depends heavily upon the relationships of solidarity with one group in particular and the ad hoc support of a number of MEPs from other factions, Kurdish 'diplomacy' is vulnerable to electoral shifts, both in the EU member-states and in the EP. 2009, for example, has seen an EP shift to the center right, but a fracturing of its Group and while the socialist and communist parties lost seats the Greens saw an increased representation. It thus remains to be seen whether we will see the same intensity of activities on the premises of the Parliament in the years ahead.

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²⁹ Most EU documents (prefixed 'Doc') are online. See: <<http://www.ena.lu>>; or <<http://www.europa.eu>>; or <<http://www.europarl.europa.eu>>; or <<http://eur-lex.europa.eu>> Document reference details in the main text are to sections/clauses (rather than pages).

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3. Transnational Politics and the EU-Turkey accession negotiations³⁰

Abstract

The growing literature on transnationalism documents the ways in which immigrants and refugees stay connected with their communities and countries of origin and shows how homeland governments reach out to their former constituents. Social, financial and political ties are extended across borders. We know little, however, about the specific ways in which oppositional transnational political practices are shaped and made effective. What is more, research on transnational political practices has often limited itself to investigations of the connections between nation-states. This paper illustrates how transnational political practices articulate different levels of policy making (local, national, supra-national) in ways that multiply the effectiveness of engagement at any one site. It will be shown that homeland political activists can effectively shape the homeland political agenda through the mobilization of immigrants' and refugees' associations and institutions in multilevel constructions of networks, constituting a space of political engagement that needs to be considered in its own right.

Keywords

transnationalism, linguistic and ethnic minorities, discourse framing, Kurdish nationalism, Turkey-EU accession negotiations.

Introduction

This paper describes how the networks of politically self-aware national or ethnic groups active in a certain country can be extended to include significant communities outside the 'homeland'. This extension of the actors involved at different sites allows the oppositional homeland political actors to push their demands upwards to supra-national levels of political organization, which leads to pressure on homeland governments and

³⁰ Published as Casier, M., Turkey's Kurds and the Quest for Recognition. Transnational politics and the EU-Turkey accession negotiations. *Ethnicities*, March 2010, Vol. 10 (1): 3-25.

institutional arrangements. But in addition to showing how this mobilization brings these resources to bear on change in the homeland, the case studied also shows how they give rise to new spaces of political engagement. The full significance of those spaces remains relatively unconsidered in existing studies of transnationalism. The particular case of how a Kurdish Mayor of Turkey's main pro-Kurdish opposition party managed to inscribe the demand for multilingual services into the Turkey-EU accession negotiations will serve to demonstrate how new spaces of political engagement come into being and successfully shape political agendas.

Data for this paper were collected from February to October 2007 and in March and April of 2008. Semi-structured interviews were conducted in Europe (Brussels and Strasbourg) and in Turkey (Diyarbakir, Ankara and Istanbul) with leading members of the main politically active Kurdish associations, members of human rights organizations, politicians, academics, intellectuals and journalists, as well as with politicians in Europe who have engaged themselves with 'the Kurdish question' and thus have become mediators to certain levels of organization. In addition to the semi-structured interviews, I took part in Kurdish delegations to the European Parliament in Brussels and the Council of Europe in Strasbourg. Interviewing and making observations was important to find out what initiatives the subjects under study had proceeded and were planning to undertake. As I was researching what could be called an political activist 'elite', for whom it was of strategic importance not to reveal their activities very openly (Aberbach & Rockman 2002), approaching them personally, conducting long conversations with them, and in particular observing them in their daily activities provided me with a kind of information that could not be gathered upon the basis of classical quantitative surveys. The interviews as well as the observations provided insight into the networks and their spatial arenas, the political demands and discourses, and the political activities directed towards members of the European institutions. This paper is written from an agency-oriented perspective, which incorporates the ways actors present their problems and develop coalitions (Smith & Bakker 2005).

In the first section of the article I begin by discussing the significance for transnational political practices of network articulation over multiple policy levels, as wells as the importance of 'frame bridging' therein. I then explore the case of Mayor Demirbaş and the Municipality of Sur. This case shows how networks and assemblages between different levels (local, national, supra-national) are constructed and how these new configurations reach beyond the limited boundaries of the nation-states in which the organizations that comprise them are presumably embedded. Special attention is given to the importance of 'frame bridging' in the construction of networks of state and non-state actors over these multiple levels as a discursive strategy to successfully set political agendas. In the final section, the supportive role of Kurdish associations of the European Kurdish diaspora in these transnational political practices is explained in detail.

1. Transnational political practices and multi-level network constructions

The literature on transnationalism is proliferating. However, most of it is concerned with: (1) the contacts immigrants sustain with their country of origin and the ways they give shape to transnational communities (Westwood & Phizaklea 2000, Nell 2004), (2) the effects of transnationalism on assimilation (Guarnizo et al. 2003), (3) the policy pursued by the sending country's government to sustain the loyalty of emigrant nationals (Portes 1999, Margheritis 2007), or (4) the explanatory factors for immigrants' transnational political engagement (Eccarius-Kelly 2002, Adamson 2001, Ögelman 2003). Less attention has been given to the transnational political practices instigated by oppositional homeland political actors and to the multi-level network construction these actors engage in. My concern here is to use the case of Mayor Demirbaş to demonstrate how oppositional homeland political actors mobilize leverage, paying particular attention to the ways in which the articulation of networks across various sites of political engagement multiplies the effectiveness of their actions. With the exceptions of Shain (2002), Al-Ali & Koser (2002) and Grojean (2008), the literature lacks case studies that try to assess the effectiveness of transnational political practices.

Several authors have explored the transnational dimensions of the Kurdish conflict in Turkey (see, for example, Wahlbeck 1999, Van Bruinessen 2000, Lyon & Uçarer 2001, Eccarius-Kelly 2002, Østergaard-Nielsen 2003, Watts 2004, Grojean 2008). However, most studies have confined themselves to the transnational political practices of immigrants and refugees living in Germany, where Turkish and Kurdish residents account for one third of all foreigners and comprise 30% of the asylum stock (Sirkeci 2006: 74).³¹ A 2003 study on the transnational political practices of Kurds and Turks in Germany found lobbying towards supra-national institutions to be a rare phenomenon (Østergaard-Nielsen, 2003). Nevertheless, in a comparative exploration of the theoretically existing political opportunities for Kurdish nationalist activists in Turkey, Germany and the European Union, Vera Eccarius-Kelly (2002) foresaw an increase in the transnational political practices of Turkey's Kurds towards the European institutions. The case presented here demonstrates that these predictions have been realized. However, it also shows that the study of the transnational political practices of Turkey's Kurds can no longer be confined to the study of transnational relations between home and receiving states, but that the political claim-making of Kurdish political activists needs to incorporate research on multiple levels of policy-making.

Transnationalism studies seek to overcome 'methodological nationalism' and 'methodological territorialism' (Wimmer & Schiller 2002). Methodological nationalism is the assumption that all social relations are organized on a national scale or are becoming nationalized (Brenner 2004: 38). 'Methodological territorialism' is the assumption that

³¹ It is argued that most of the 1990s asylum seekers from Turkey to Europe were Kurds, as human rights violations during the last 25 years were mainly suffered by Kurdish citizens and most cases were related to the practices after the military coup of 1980 and the armed conflict between the Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK) and the Turkish Army (Sirkeci 2006: 69).

all social relations are organized within self-enclosed, discretely bounded territorial containers (Brenner 2004: 38). However, although most authors avoid the trap of methodological nationalism, most studies on transnationalism still tend to be restricted to the transactions of ideas, people and material between the home state and the receiving state (see, for example, Portes 2001, Guarnizo et al. 2003, Argun 2003). Therefore, the trap of 'methodological territorialism' is not entirely overcome, since the transnational political practices are still situated primarily in and between the national territories of the home and receiving states. If we follow the different trajectories of the actors involved, however, we see that transnational political practices oriented towards homeland political situations involve more actors and levels of policy-making than typically presumed. Furthermore, we also see how these organizations and connections are constitutive of a distinct political space – or 'space of political engagement' – that deserves to be studied in its own right. A space of political efficacy and performance is created that, in many ways, stands apart from the traditional levels of political organization (e.g., municipality, nation-state, EU, etc.). Concepts that are crucial to understanding the making of this space and its political significance include the notions of 'network articulation' and 'frame bridging'.

The case of Mayor Demirbaş and Sur demonstrates how marginalized actors manage to press their claims through engagement at spatial levels of policy-making (for other examples, see Haarstad & Fløysand 2007 and Smith & Guarnizo 1998). By developing networks that articulate multiple sites and levels of political organization, movements can circumvent the historically entrenched political hierarchies (Smith 1995). The ability to press claims at multiple levels of policy-making enhances the effectiveness of an otherwise local opposition group. A 'new political space' is developed, outside the boundaries of the nation-state. This spatial configuration is composed of networks of social, cultural and economic relations and occupied by the conscious association of actors in separate locations linking themselves via networks for specific political and social ends (Marden 1997). The spatial configuration resembles what Thomas Faist has defined as a 'transnational social space': that is, a space consisting of 'combinations of sustained social and symbolic ties, their contents, positions in networks and organizations, that can be found in multiple states' (Faist 2000: 199). This new political space has the ability to change the relationship between the marginalized and the dominant, and as such it is a form of empowerment. Our case study demonstrates the complex spatial power configurations that emerge through engagement in transnational political practices. These configurations involve Kurdish politicians in southeast Turkey, Kurdish associations in Europe, immigrant media, non-governmental organisations, national politicians in the states in which Kurdish immigrants are residing, along with international advocacy groups and members of supra-national institutions, etc. Networks are constructed and maintained that make it possible to articulate issues at higher levels to mobilize leverage (Haarstad & Fløysand 2007).

However, the production of such a space depends crucially on the effectiveness and flexibility of discursive strategies. Gaining access to influential politicians at different

levels of policy-making requires deliberation over the discourses that will be employed. The success of transnational political practices depends on choosing the right problems to present as rallying points and paying attention to how these problems are presented or framed. Interest groups thus adapt their discourse and narratives to institutional realities. Vis-à-vis European institutions, Kurdish groups have successfully framed their concerns in terms of human rights and democracy (see also Adamson 2001, Natali 2005; Østergaard-Nielsen 2003). Frames help to interpret problems, to define problems for action and suggest pathways to remedy the problem. They enable (re)interpretation and representation, and help to (re)define grievances and claims. Social movements are involved in struggles over meaning as they attempt to influence policy – hence, an essential task is to frame problems and injustices in a way that convinces a wide and diverse audience of the necessity for, and utility of, attempts to redress them. Consequently, frames are not given but rather created and transformed in the process of contestation (Zald 1996). Whether the information that is distributed will lead to common action depends on whether different actors will identify with the cause of concern (Tarrow & Mc Adam 2003). The symbols, narratives and metaphors that are used by those who speak out must resonate with those of other actors; otherwise, they will fail to convey the meaning that the speaker intends (Hardy et al. 2000). Such actors are engaging in ‘frame bridging’ (Snow & Benford 2000). Section 2 of this paper provides a lively example of how discourses are framed in order to successfully influence policy-makers at different levels. The case demonstrates how Kurdish associations and the pro-Kurdish Democratic Society Party (Demokratik Toplum Partisi, DTP) have developed their own particular narrative of this discourse on democracy, deploying it to renegotiate their position in relations of power (Haarstad & Fløysand 2007). First, however, I briefly sketch the contours of the Kurdish question in Turkey.

2. Lobbying the EU: the case of Mayor Demirbaş

Lobbying against the background of the accession negotiations

In 2005, the EU gave the green light to open accession negotiations with Turkey. This sparked debates in Europe about the authority of Turkey’s democratic credentials, and the position of Turkey’s Kurdish minority. While it is beyond the scope of this paper to explore the limits of Turkish democracy, it is important to note that the ideology underpinning dominant state institutions forecloses the political opportunities of groups who identify themselves outside of it. According to Dorronsoro (2005), the Turkish political system can be defined as a ‘security regime’: a meta-ideology of ‘national security’ is central to the Turkish political system, and it stands particularly central to the ideological foundation of the regime that followed the 1980 military coup (Dorronsoro 2005). This meta-ideology is present within the various political ideologies in Turkey and, more importantly, it dictates what can and cannot be regarded as politically legitimate. This hegemonic idea of the overall importance of national security

justifies interventions by the security services and the judiciary in the areas of political parties, social activities, the distribution of information, the media, education, and so on (Dorransoro 2005). This meta-ideology also enables mobilization around the themes of internal and international plotters who seek to de-stabilize, or even destroy, the Turkish state and society. The Kurdish nationalist movement is regarded as one of the main threats to the integrity of the identity and territorial conceptualization underpinning Turkey's national institutions and, hence, as a threat to national security. The roots of the Kurdish question in Turkey can be traced back to the 1920s, the first decade following the founding of the modern Turkish state, which abolished the Caliphate and introduced a centralized authority affecting the long time quasi-autonomy the Kurdish provinces had enjoyed under the Ottoman Empire (see Taspinar 2005, McDowall 1996). These developments exacerbated a legitimacy crisis for the nationalist-secularist Ankara government in the Kurdish provinces. A national education system and military service were installed which served as instruments for the 'Turkification' of the Kurdish inhabitants in the Southeast of the Country. In answer to these changes Kurdish dissidents started to organize themselves and staged rebellions in the 1920s and 1930s (Taspinar 2005). As the rebellions were crushed by severe military repression it took until the end of the 1960s for Kurdish dissidents to politically organize themselves again. During the last thirty years the Kurdish nationalist movement however managed to gain substantial support among the Kurdish population in Turkey and turn itself into a mass movement (Romano 2006).³²

In the early 1990s, Turkey experienced a first period of liberalization under late president Turgut Özal. This opened public discussion about the ethnic, religious and linguistic diversity of the country – a discussion that was brought to the fore by the Iraqi-Kurdish refugee crisis on Turkey's border following the 1991 Gulf War. Prior to that, the central discourse had been that Kurds could become Turkish (Yeğen 2007). Every inhabitant of the country was considered to be a Turkish citizen and was expected to speak the Turkish language. In fact, during several periods in the last century, the

³²It is hard to find data on the precise number of Kurdish people living in Turkey and in the diaspora, since ethnicity is not officially recorded. Koc et al. estimate the number of Kurdish-speaking people in Turkey to be 10.2 million (or 14.4% of the total population of Turkey). This estimation is based on the results of the 2003 Turkish Demographic and Health Survey (TDHS-2003). Through interviews, the TDHS gathered information about the mother tongue of 11,950 women in Turkey. This let them determine the 'language group' these women belong to. Other estimates of the number of Kurds in Turkey and in the Middle East are less conservative. In 1996, for example, McDowall estimated that around 24-27 million Kurds were living in the Middle East, of which around 13 million were living in Turkey, which made up about 23% of the total population. An important remark made by McDowall is that it is not clear how many of these people actually consider themselves to be Kurds, due to the high numbers of people who have assimilated into the Turkish society. However, it is likely that, due to the repression of the past few decades, many people have rediscovered their Kurdish identity. This is probably the case in Turkey (McDowall 1996; Van Bruinessen 1998), as well as in the space of immigration, among first and second generation immigrants (Grojean 2008, Van Bruinessen 1998). According to many Kurdish nationalists, the number of Kurds living in Turkey is no less than 20 million, but most scholars consider this to be an exaggeration, and very little evidence supports this number.

private and public use of the Kurdish language was officially forbidden. Up to this day, politicians are still required to speak in Turkish.

Since 1984, an armed conflict has been fought between the Kurdistan Workers' Party or PKK and the Turkish army. In the 1980s and the 1990s, the conflict and the subsequent violations of human rights drew attention – nationally and internationally – to the reality of the Kurdish question. The armed conflict led to significant repression of the Kurds living in southeastern Turkey. The repression and the climate of insecurity led many Kurds to flee the rural areas and to settle in big cities in western Turkey or to apply for asylum in Europe (Sirkeci 2000, Romano 2006). Exact numbers of the amount of Turkish Kurds currently residing in the West of Europe are unavailable, as ethnicity is not registered. Several authors have estimated the number around 650 000 by the mid-1990s (White 2000; Van Bruinessen 1998), but the number is still considered speculative (Sirkeci, 2006: 68-69). The repression by the Turkish army and security forces was found to be partly responsible for shaping the opportunities for the PKK to become a mass movement in Turkey (Romano 2006). The development towards a mass movement gave shape to the rise of civil society organizations and political parties working within the ideological sphere of the PKK. One of these parties is the DTP, and its Mayor's actions are the focus of our case study.

Kurdish activists consider the EU-Turkey accession negotiation period as one during which the brokers of Kurdish organizations and parties will have the best bargaining position to realize change at home. Yet they are aware of the power imbalances. As a state actor, Turkey has many more opportunities to propagate its views about the political situation in Turkey at the level of the European Union. Especially, as this entails unrest and reports of human rights abuses in the Kurdish heartland of Southeast Anatolia and the armed conflict with the PKK. During the period of the accession negotiations, Turkey has regular contacts with all the members of the European Commission, as well as with the Council of Ministers, with whom the final decision concerning accession rests. Although 'the Kurdish question' is presented by Kurdish politicians as the most important problem for the future of Turkey, it is only of secondary importance to the negotiating states. They consider the European Union primarily an economic union, and are still debating the political integration of Europe.

Notwithstanding these power imbalances, Kurdish organizations and the main pro-Kurdish party are actively engaged in transnational political practices, making use of the political opportunities at multiple levels of policy-making. Via the development of networks of both governmental and non-governmental actors, sites of cooperation are being developed that cut across established hierarchies (Khaler 2006). Lobby activities are being directed towards members of the European Parliament, members of the Council of Europe and, to a lesser extent, towards members of the European Commission. Additionally, the legislative and judiciary bodies in Turkey are influenced indirectly by Turkey's many convictions on charges of human rights violations by the European Court of Human Rights. These convictions increase the legitimacy of the

demands being made by Kurdish lobbyists and make it easier to advance claims about Turkey's policies towards its Kurdish minority.

Mayor in action

On 15 March 2007, thirty members of the European Parliament addressed the following letter to the Turkish Minister of the Interior:

"Dear Minister of the Interior,

We as members of the European Parliament are highly concerned about your appeal of 5 January 2007 for the dismissal of the Mayor of Sur Municipality Abdullah Demirbas and the dissolution of the Sur Municipal Council.

The initiative of the Sur Municipality to adopt multilingualism in their municipal services for the local public is highly necessary, according to a public survey carried out in 2006. According to this survey, 72% of the local residents speak Kurdish. In order to fulfil its duties and responsibilities properly and in order to meet the demands of its inhabitants, it is of vital importance for the municipality to have a lively exchange with its residents.

One of the governing principles of European Union politics is the concept of "Unity in Diversity". With this political guideline, the European Union has grown to an entity of 27 States with more than 27 official languages.

In consideration of the above, we urge you, Mr. Aksu, and the Turkish authorities to reconsider your appeal for the impeachment of Mayor Demirbas and to respect the diversity of Turkey, especially with regard to the upcoming accession talks of the chapter "Youth and Culture".³³

By the end of June 2007, Abdullah Demirbaş, Mayor of Sur, the centre of Diyarbakir, the largest Kurdish city in Turkey, was flying to Europe for the second time in two months. He and his municipal council had been removed from office as the result of the Turkish High Court decision stating that the organization of municipal services – such as the dissemination of information on culture, hygiene, health, domestic violence and environment in the city – could not be delivered in any language other than Turkish. The Sur municipality's decision had been made on the basis of a survey conducted among 8,920 households in the municipality. As the members of the European Parliament noted, 72% of those responding to the survey identified Kurdish as their mother tongue. Only 24% identified themselves as native speakers of Turkish. The remaining gave Arabic, Armenian and Syriac to be their language of daily life. Based on the results of the survey, Demirbaş agreed with Osman Baydemir, the Major of Greater Diyarbakir, to implement a multilingual local policy. As a result of this agreement, Demirbaş had arrived in Brussels with a prison sentence of one to three years hanging over his head.

³³Official letter, dated 15 March 2007, addressed to Mr. Abdülkadir Aksu, the Turkish Minister of the Interior, signed by 30 members of the European Parliament.

Confronted with dismissal and prosecution, Demirbaş sought to mobilize sympathy and support in Europe.

The first time the Mayor called for a multilingual approach to municipal services in front of an international audience was at the January 2006 European Social Forum in Athens, Greece. Before and after the municipality's announcement of its decision to organize multilingual municipal services, this policy was discussed within the Council of Europe, seeking for their approval.³⁴

One of the effects of the armed conflict has been an increased prejudice against the use of the Kurdish language by politicians, which is generally associated with the separatist claims of the PKK. Thus, the case of Mayor Demirbaş and the Sur municipality is an unparalleled political initiative in the region. No other mayor or municipal council in Turkey has openly engaged in the public use of Kurdish. Mayors, as well as the staff of municipalities run by the DTP, do use Kurdish in day-to-day relations with their constituents, but they have never attempted to adopt its use through an official decision by their municipal councils. DTP Brussels considers this case a 'test' for Turkey. But the decision to take up and draw attention to this particular case is no coincidence – the strategy has been well thought-out and carefully planned by the Kurdish 'lobbyists', who aim to gain the sympathy of a broad and international audience.

Because of the 10% threshold for parliamentary representation in Turkey, the main pro-Kurdish party lacked political presence in Parliament until the latest elections in July 2007. This lack of national political representation encouraged some of the democratically elected Kurdish mayors to organize themselves internationally.³⁵ In May 2007, Mayor Demirbaş first took part in a delegation of the DTP³⁶-Brussels to the European Parliament. This trip was organized by the director of the Kurdish Institute in Brussels, and sought to draw attention to the threat of dismissal faced by the Mayor and his Council. Mayor Demirbaş presented his case to several members of the European Parliament (EP), and a press conference was hosted by a Belgian Member of European Parliament (MEP) from the Flemish Green party³⁷. During the press conference in the European Parliament, the Mayor stated: 'We believe that different cultures can live together in unity, and the best example of this is the European Union.' (personal notes, 9 May 2007)

³⁴ Interview with an active member of the Freedom Initiative in Strasbourg, 27 May 2007.

³⁵ On the political role of the Kurdish mayors in Turkey, see Watts 2006a and 2006b.

³⁶ DTP is the *Demokratik Toplum Partisi* or the Party for a Democratic Society, the main pro-Kurdish party in Turkey with about 54 democratically elected mayors. The DTP is considered to be the successor of DEHAP, HADEP, DEP and HEP. The latter three were closed down during the 1990s and the beginning of the current millennium because of alleged separatism. DEHAP disbanded itself before the party was sentenced, and its members established the DTP. All DEHAP mayors subsequently joined the newly founded party. At the time of this writing, the pro-Kurdish party was again under serious threat of being closed down, and its successor, *Bariş ve Demokrasi Partisi* (BDP) or the Party for Freedom and Democracy, had already been established in case the verdict demanded the party's closure.

³⁷ Personal observations in European Parliament, Brussels, 8 & 9 May 2007.

One month later, the Mayor's agenda included the Council of Europe in Strasbourg, where short informal meetings were organized on the spot. Meetings were held through the intermediation of Kurdish journalists involved in the production of Kurdish media (directed at the Kurds at home and abroad) and through the intermediation of members of Europe-based Kurdish pressure groups comprising Kurdish political refugees. Accompanied by the European representative of the DTP, Demirbaş visited members of the Congress of Local and Regional Authorities of the Council of Europe (who promote local and regional democracy among the member states of the Council of Europe) as well as members of the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe (PACE) from different European countries³⁸. Those visited included observers of the last monitoring committee of the human rights situation in Turkey. As he had done earlier to the Members of the European Parliament, Demirbaş explained to the members of the Council of Europe (CE) that he and his council had decided to organize multilingual municipal services on the basis of a survey that gave evidence of the multilingual reality of the municipality. In the future, services would be provided in Turkish, Kurdish, Syriac, Arabic, Armenian and, to encourage tourism, English. However, only hours after the Mayor had announced these plans, a judicial investigation had been launched upon the request of Turkey's Minister of the Interior, so he explained.

Mayor Demirbaş:

"This decision handicaps minorities and pretends as if their language does not exist. [...]"

Senior member of the Council of Europe:

"I totally agree with you! Language is existential. There is the aspect of cultural identity and the aspect of communication, as well as the democratic aspect. This is the standpoint which I defend within the European Union as well."³⁹

Demirbaş argued that, on the very day he was removed from office because of his multilingual initiative, Turkey turned to the United Nations to insist on the implementation of measurements to safeguard the language of Turkish-speaking citizens in Kosovo. On the other hand Turkey was requesting from Germany to acknowledge Turkish as a second language.

Mayor Demirbaş:

"Thus they want protection for the Turkish language for their own people, but at the same time they fired me."⁴⁰

Furthermore, Demirbaş and the DTP European representative stressed that Turkish authorities responded repressively to an initiative that, would be considered standard

³⁸ Personal observations in the Council of Europe, 27 and 28 May 2007, Strasbourg.

³⁹ Personal observations in the Council of Europe, 28 May 2007, Strasbourg

⁴⁰ Personal observations in the Council of Europe, 28 May 2007, Strasbourg.

procedure in European countries such as Belgium or Spain. Picking up on the criticisms expressed in previous progress reports by the European Commission, the DTP delegation characterized the Turkish measures as clear illustrations of the freezing of reform by Ankara.⁴¹

Member of the post-monitoring committee of the Council of Europe:

“What was the legal basis of this decision [to dismiss the Mayor and the Council]?”

Mayor Demirbaş:

“It is forbidden to use other languages besides Turkish. It is in contradiction with the Constitution.”

Member:

“But a law was accepted to allow for the use of Kurdish in education and broadcasting?”

Mayor Demirbaş:

“Well, this reaction of Turkey shows that these were merely ‘make-up’. I have been in Compostella and have seen how Spanish, Galician and English are used. We want to do the same. In Europe there is a mentality in favour of multilingualism.”⁴²

That the Mayor and the council had been dismissed – with criminal prosecution and possible prison sentences – as the consequence of their decision to organise multilingual communal services did not fall on deaf ears in the EP and the CE. The Congress of Local and Regional Authorities had already been informed about the developments through letters from Mayor Baydemir and the United Cities and Local Governments (UCLG). The UCLG includes municipalities from all over the world and is committed to local democracy and autonomy and participative local governance. Membership in this union allows the municipality of Diyarbakir to have a more direct impact on the Congress of Local and Regional Authorities of the Council of Europe since they have many overlapping memberships.⁴³ So, the Congress of Local and Regional Authorities was happy to announce that it would send a delegation to Diyarbakir to see if there were impediments to the guaranty of local democracy.⁴⁴ Members of PACE promised to criticize Turkish members of the Council and to write letters of concern to the Turkish

⁴¹ Personal observations in the Council of Europe, 27 and 28 May 2007, Strasbourg

⁴² Personal observations in the Council of Europe, 28 May 2007, Strasbourg

⁴³ Interview with member of the Foreign Relations Office of Greater Diyarbakir Municipality, 27 March 2008.

⁴⁴ The European Charter of Local Self-Government came into force on 9 September 1988. It is the instrument of the Congress of Local and Regional Authorities of the Council of Europe, in which the signatory States undertake to recognize the principle of local self-government in domestic legislation. At the time of this writing, Turkey had not yet signed this charter.

Prime Minister and the Minister of Interior. Mayor Demirbaş was advised to take his case to the European Court of Human Rights if no further appeal were possible on the national (Turkish) level.⁴⁵

When evaluating Turkey's progress regarding EU membership criteria, the European Commission's progress report of 6 November 2007 explicitly referred to the court ruling on the case of Sur municipality in pointing out that no measures had been taken to facilitate access to public services for non-Turkish speakers:

"No measures have been taken to facilitate access to public services for non-speakers of Turkish, although interpretation is usually available in courts. In a case against the municipality of Sur in June 2007 the Council of State dismissed the Mayor from office and dissolved the Municipal Council for providing multilingual municipal services."

For the organizations involved in lobbying, access to the members of the Enlargement Commission (which is part of the European Commission) is limited, but the case did show up on this commission's agenda nonetheless. The Enlargement Commission is to support and monitor Turkey in its legislative reforms. The Kurdish question, which is cautiously discussed as an individual human rights problem, is being discussed directly with the Turkish authorities. However, when it comes to information gathering on the human rights situation in Turkey, the Commission relies mainly on the information it gathers through its delegation in Ankara and the Turkey experts in Brussels.⁴⁶ The Ankara delegation of the European Commission, as well as its Turkish Unit in Brussels, bases its reports on the recommendations of the Council of Europe and international institutions and the information that is distributed by international human rights organizations.⁴⁷ The international human rights organisations receive information from various Kurdish human rights organizations and parties, which is then investigated and, if confirmed, made public. Demirbaş' case came to be mentioned specifically in the July 2007 briefing paper on human rights concerns in Turkey – first in the lead up to the election (Human Rights Watch 2007), in the Council of Europe's report of the Congress of Local and Regional Authorities and later that year in the European Commission's Progress Report of November 2007.

Questioning the boundaries of the legitimate

In August 2007, the Congress of Local and Regional Authorities sent a fact-finding mission to Sur/Diyarbakir and Ankara. The mission's final report states the following:

⁴⁵Personal observations, 26 May 2007, Congress for Local and Regional Authorities in the Council of Europe, Strasbourg.

⁴⁶ Interview with Enlargement Commission member, July 2007, Brussels.

⁴⁷ Interview with member of the Ankara delegation to the European Commission, Ankara, April 2008,

“For the Congress and for the maintenance of high standards of local authority autonomy, the dismissal of elected local government officials by means other than popular vote is plainly a matter of the highest importance...” (CG/BUR (14)29REV2: 3).

In its concluding statements, the report demanded that the government of Turkey take Kurdish language rights into serious consideration, given the European Commission’s and the EU Parliament’s demands to draft a new civil constitution. The Congress invited the newly elected Turkish Minister of the Interior to the November 2007 autumn session of the Parliamentary Assembly in Strasbourg to ‘outline the policy that the new government of Turkey intends to follow with regard to these issues.’ The report stated further that:

“the Congress should encourage the Turkish government, as it ventures on a new phase of reform and modernisation, to underpin its commitment to diversity and pluralism by signing the European Charter for Regional and Minority Languages and the Framework Convention for the Protection of National Minorities.”(CG/BUR (14)29REV2: 6)

Subsequently, Mayor Demirbaş, together with Mayor Baydemir of Greater Diyarbakir, took the floor at the November 2007 session of the PACE in Strasbourg. This event greatly embarrassed other Turkish mayors present, some of whom began to cross-examine the two mayors like state prosecutors arguing at a highly politicized court case. To the disappointment of the members of the Congress for Local and Regional authorities, neither Turkey’s Minister of the Interior, nor any other high-ranking official, turned up at the session.⁴⁸

Drawing on the work of Michel Foucault, Watts has described how Kurdish politicians in the southeast engage in ‘symbolic-politics’ by using Kurdish in their municipalities (Watts 2006b). What happens is that Kurdish politicians act ‘as if’ new rights and freedoms are in place. Engaging in the frameworks of the European Institutions and the current discourses on improving the democratic standards of Turkey, they act, confrontationally, ‘as if’ they occupy a political space within which this initiative is legitimate. Keeping in mind that Turkey can be regarded as a ‘security regime’ with the fear of national and territorial disintegration at the core of its meta-ideology, the political initiatives in Sur municipality consciously intend to stretch the boundaries of what can be considered legal and legitimate behaviour within Turkey’s boundaries (Wedeen in Watts 2006b). The initiative for providing multilingual services, taken by the Mayor and his council, obviously has juridical repercussions. From the standpoint of the Kurdish lobbyists, the juridical harassment in this case reveals what they perceive to be the current condition of democracy in Turkey and the lack of serious political reforms. By exposing this reality to the outside world – and, more specifically, to members of the union of States with which Turkey is in a bargaining position – the Kurdish party, supported by the Kurdish organizations in Europe, can embarrass Turkey and may thus

⁴⁸Interview with advisor in the Foreign Relations Office of Greater Diyarbakir Municipality, 27 March 2008.

indirectly force its authorities to lift the charges in certain much-discussed court cases. If they succeed in this political embarrassment (Hobson et al. 2007), they will be stretching the boundaries of what is considered legal or illegal and thus giving shape to what they think the democratization of Turkey should be like.

Enhancing democracy

Kurdish lobbyists share a discourse that emphasizes the importance of enhancing democracy within Turkey. Kurdish organizations and the DTP generally place the Kurdish question, and thus themselves, in a key position within a narrative on the democratization of Turkey. In their narration of the political situation, democracy will reign only once the Kurdish question in Turkey is resolved. In this way, they pose the Kurdish question as the root cause of the lack of democracy in Turkey. In their opinion, Turkey's policy towards the Kurds reveals the power of the military over civil power, the lack of human rights, the centralist character of political authority and the intolerant character of Turkish nationalism. In contrast, the Kurdish politicians demand restriction of the military's power and enforcement of civilian authority, the decentralization of political power, and the organization of a multi-cultural society, with respect for people's language, culture and religion.

The demands of the Kurdish organisations fit within the frames of the Parliament of Europe and the Council of Europe. Many MEPs personally regard the European Parliament as the most democratic and idealistic institution of Europe and bear witness to the ideological bargaining space that exists within Parliament. This is even more the case for the members of the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe, since the Council of Europe considers Human Rights and the rights of minorities as two of its main objectives and is actively involved in monitoring its member states accordingly.⁴⁹ Turkey has been a member since 1949. Since the Council of Europe presents itself as the guardian of Human Rights, political issues are often re-framed as human rights questions. Instead of propagating an ethno-nationalist message towards the European institutions, the Kurdish movement defends respect for individual human rights and demands equal treatment of all citizens within Turkey (see also Natali, 2005; Adamson in Al-Ali & Köser, 2003). The case of Sur Municipality is only one of many cases that can be seen as examples fitting within this strategy of frame bridging.

However, it is important to remember that reaching out to multiple policy levels can have a transformative effect on the actors and their messages. Adopting a discourse on human rights and democratisation leads the actors to incorporate the meaning of that discourse, so that we cannot reduce it to a mere strategic move, but we have to see it as something that is changing the actors themselves as well. Thus, while initially this

⁴⁹ See the website of the Council of Europe:
http://www.coe.int/t/dghl/monitoring/minorities/default_en.asp

discourse might have been primarily a pragmatic choice, over time it grew more important in the general discourse of the political party.

The successful exposure of the judicial obstacles the Mayor and his council members have encountered, due to the seemingly rightful decision to organize multilingual services, has turned the Mayor into one of the central figures in the Kurdish opposition party's 'foreign relations' department. Clearly, the Kurdish political activists have learned how rewarding lobbying around this case has been in order to increase awareness and support for their political positions and goals. So, it was no surprise when, on 2 October 2008, the Kurdish satellite television Roj-TV broadcasted how Mayor Demirbaş, upon the initiative of the Kurdish Institute of Brussels, was honoured by six well-known Flemish politicians from five different political parties for his encouragement to increase tolerance and respect for ethnic minorities and their right to be served in their mother tongue by the civil servants of their municipalities. This brings us to the importance of the Kurdish associations in the receiving states and their networking to access politicians in these states.

European Kurdish associations and multi-level network construction

Network construction can be a question of mobilizing those who identify with the goals of some agent or organization or who share its interests (Cox 1998). With the support of Kurdish associations in the receiving state, Demirbaş' case was taken to members of the European Parliament and the Council of Europe. As such, the DTP 'jumped' from a local (urban) level of policy-making in southeastern Turkey to that of the immigrants' and refugees' receiving states, and then – via established and newly construed networks with different policy-makers – to the institutions of the European Union.⁵⁰ These multi-levelled networks include local peoples and organizations and demonstrate that what may be perceived as a local movement (the Mayor and his council) is never wholly local but produced in part by extra-local actors and forces. This recognition confounds perspectives that view 'the global' as powerful and dominant and 'the local' as powerless and subordinate (Perreault 2003) and calls attention to conceptualizations and configurations of power that have been obviated by the dominant rhetoric of order (Parker 2009). Through the construction of networks over multiple levels, local actors can enlarge their spaces of political action considerably.

Without the existence and support of Kurdish associations and federations in the European states on the one hand, and global networks such as the UCLG on the other

⁵⁰ It must be added that the networks explored here are only a few of several, interconnected networks. The support base in the European Parliament, for example, is broader, especially given the strong relations of the DTP with the Greens and United Left/Nordic Green Left fraction, the existence of a friendship group of members of diverse fractions, and the DTP's membership in the Socialist International and the European Socialist Party.

hand, it would have been hard for Mayor Demirbaş to access members of the European Parliament and members of the Council of Europe. In a state like Belgium, ethnic associations appealing to members of a single ethnic community are prevalent (Hooghe 2005). Since the beginning of the 1980s, the Kurdish Institute in Brussels has developed ties with Flemish (and, to a much lesser extent, Walloon) politicians, who work either at a regional (Flemish/Walloon/Brussels), national (Belgium) or supra-national (European) level. Ever since the foundation of the Institute, a strong relationship has existed between the principal figures of the organization and the Flemish nationalist parties (with the exception of the extreme right party). These parties have long shown sensitivity to problems concerning language rights, and they are defenders of a people's right to self-determination. The European representative of the DTP in Brussels depends to a certain extent on the Kurdish Institute of Brussels and its relations with politicians for its lobby work in the European Parliament. In the particular case of Demirbaş, the Kurdish Institute of Brussels advised the DTP European representative on whom to talk to, and meetings were organized via its connections in the cabinet of one of the Flemish MEPs.

Over the past few years, Flemish Members of Parliament and the Senate have been taking part in a monthly working group on the Kurdish issue in the House of Parliamentarians in Brussels, which is part of the Belgian Senate. During these meetings, initiated by the Kurdish Institute of Brussels, participants share information about the current developments in Turkey and in the Kurdish region. Concerted activities are organized, including conferences and delegations to the Kurdish regions in Turkey and Iraq. The possibilities of interpellating Belgian Ministers are discussed. One of the group's main goals is to put pressure on Members of the European Parliament to attach amendments to the EU's progress reports on Turkey and to write letters of concern to Ministers of European member states and the government of Turkey.⁵¹ The variety of state and non-state actors active on different levels and brought together in this work group can be regarded as constitutive of a particular political configuration that incorporates actors from very different levels of policy-making. Via participation in this political configuration, constructed by the efforts of the Institute, a political party such as the DTP and its local politicians in Turkey can gain attention and influence. Connections with nationally based Kurdish associations (in the receiving states) and their networks within a specific state (or states) are indispensable to a political party, like the DTP, in its struggle to gain Europe's attention. Dependent on only one official European representative for all contacts within Europe, the party relies on information and contacts provided by Kurdish associations and institutions in their different countries of residence. Although this dependency is an advantage for a political opposition party, it also implies that these European Kurdish associations (composed mainly of politically active members of the Kurdish diaspora), which are part of this political configuration, can weigh significantly on the initiatives that are undertaken by

⁵¹ Based upon interviews with the former president of the working group, 9 August 2007, Antwerp and several encounters with the director of the Kurdish Institute in Brussels in spring and summer 2007.

the DTP. We cannot explore this further in this paper, but clearly this has the effect of limiting the autonomy the party enjoys within Europe.

The political configuration formed by the working group constitutes a base from which information is diffused and new contacts are brokered to extend the network of influence. As such, the members of the working group, who are employed in the cabinets of the Members of the European Parliament, arranged formal and informal meetings between the Mayor and other members of the European Parliament. Meanwhile, members of Kurdish associations supported the Mayor's lobby work in the Council of Europe in Strasbourg. Through these political configurations, as well as the efforts of the Greater Municipality of Diyarbakir within the World Organization of United Cities and Local Governments, Turkey's Kurds have established a new space of engagement, outside the boundaries of any one state, but nevertheless dependent on access to various actors in multiple states. From this political space, the transnational political practices of Turkey's Kurds clearly affect the agendas of the European Institutions in their relations with Turkey.

Conclusion

The preceding case study demonstrates how the DTP mobilized resources at multiple levels of political organization to set agendas in Europe and bring about change at home. This case illustrates the importance of network constructions that imply the transgression of levels of policy-making, which, in transnationalism studies, are still too often assumed to be confined to the home and receiving states. Transnational practices can transgress borders continuously and are organized in a space of engagement that can no longer be regarded as part of any one place.

What is more, this particular case sheds light on the importance of discursive framing on our understanding of the ways in which transnational political practices can affect the exogenous institutions to put pressure on the home state governments. The Kurdish nationalists of the DTP sought to publicize the harassment they faced from the Turkish judiciary, inviting EU lawmakers to view the case as a yardstick of democracy in Turkey. By exposing this harassment to the outside world – and, more specifically, to members of the States of the European Union with whom Turkey is in a bargaining position – and by drawing on the complex web of actors assembled through the actions of Kurdish organizations in Europe, the pro-Kurdish party can embarrass Turkey and indirectly increase pressure to lift the charges in certain much-discussed cases. In this way, Kurdish political activists can stretch the boundaries of what is considered legal or illegal and give shape to how they think Turkey should be democratized. Concretely Turkey was scrutinized over the case of Mayor Demirbas and the Sur municipality in the EC Commission 2007 Progress Report, in the report following the fact-finding mission of the Congress for Local and Regional Authorities of the Council of Europe, in the writings of members of European Parliament and in briefings by Human Rights Watch on Turkey.

This case, which demonstrates the complex entanglement of a variety of actors distributed across multiple levels of political organization, testifies to the importance of multi-level networking and the framing of discourses as strategies to change unequal relations of power. Moreover, it shows the relevance of these conceptualizations for future studies on transnationalism, as following the trajectories towards the networks that constitute this space of engagement unravels the multiple agents engaged in transnational political practices over multiple spaces and makes one less likely to fall into the trap of methodological territorialism that transnationalism has sought to avoid.

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Part 2:

**The Kurdish nationalist
movement's internationalization
of the Kurdish cause:
challenges and opportunities**

4. Contesting the ‘Truth’ over Turkey’s Human Rights Situation: State-Association Interactions in and outside the Southeast⁵²

Abstract

The first decade of the 21st century saw Turkish state actors – under pressure from the European Union – initiate a kind of institutionalization of human rights. Initially, a window of opportunity for cooperation seemed to emerge between these actors and the country’s human rights associations, which state officials had for many years viewed as a threat and undermining state policies. This paper examines the institutionalization process and relations between human rights associations and Turkish officials. It shows that despite early indications of a more cooperative relationship, the process has produced a dual system comprised of mutually antagonistic actors: new state-centric institutional bodies on the one hand, and the established human rights associations on the other. Instead of cooperation, the newly developing structures appear to be challenging the authority of Turkey’s human rights associations over the ‘truth’ concerning respect for human rights in Turkey, especially regarding the Kurdish question. The institutionalization of human rights has been achieved in such a way as to lend state institutions the image of cooperation with a wide range of civil society actors, while in reality it is exclusive of those associations deemed a threat to the state’s reproduction of itself and the self-image it wants to portray. The paper demonstrates this by examining: (1) the ways in which the institutionalization process has developed; (2) the nature and workings of the new government-led human rights body; and (3) how this relates to shifts in patterns of relations between the human rights associations and EU institutions.

Keywords

Turkey, state-society relations, Kurdish question, human rights, institutionalization, Turkey’s EU accession

⁵² Published as Casier, M. (2009), Contesting the ‘Truth’ of Turkey’s Human Rights Situation: State-Association Interactions in and outside the Southeast, *European Journal of Turkish Studies* [Online], 10 | 2009, Online since 15 February 2010, URL : <http://ejts.revues.org/index4190.html>

Introduction

“Without public pressure it is impossible to achieve change. The state is aware of this and thus marginalizes human rights organizations. It turns them into targets. If a soldier dies, the high ranked military officers say ‘Where are the human rights defenders now?’ They try to tell the public that the human rights associations are merely interested in the lives of the ‘terrorists’ and not in the lives of their children” (Ayhan Bilgen, former president of Mazlum-Der, personal interview, 14 January 2009, Ankara).

Among the changes that took place in Turkey in the first decade of the 21st century was the way some branches of the state engaged the question of human rights.⁵³ In good part due to pressure from the European Union – specifically, in order to gain formal acceptance of Turkey’s candidacy and move towards meeting the political conditions of the Copenhagen criteria for accession – governments in Ankara enacted a series of legal reforms aimed at providing “*stability of institutions guaranteeing democracy, the rule of law, human rights and respect for and protection of minorities*”.⁵⁴

Long critical of Turkey’s human rights record, particularly in the southeastern part of the country, European institutions have actively supported the Turkish government in its reform drive, stressing the need to develop working relations with civil society. And indeed, the government did consult with human rights associations during the legislative process in the first half of the decade. These included international associations such as Human Rights Watch and national ones such as the Human Rights Foundation of Turkey [*Türkiye İnsan Hakları Vakfı*, or TİHV], and the Human Rights Association [*İnsan Hakları Derneği*, or İHD].⁵⁵ There thus appeared to be a window of opportunity for cooperation between at least some branches of the state and the country’s human rights associations, and a chance for the deepening and enhancement of the role of civil society in national affairs. Ideally, this would both assist the development and protection of basic liberties, including those newly won, and enable violations to be addressed, in particular those related to Turkey’s Kurdish question, and the armed conflict that resulted from it.⁵⁶

However, this process has not resulted in a more cooperative relationship between the country’s human rights associations and relevant state institutions. On the contrary, the process seems to be producing a dual system comprised of mutually antagonistic actors: the new state-centric institutional bodies, on the one hand, and the established domestic

⁵³ The author would like to acknowledge her gratitude for the insightful comments of Nicole Watts, Andy Hilton and Joost Jongerden, as well as the critiques from the referees.

⁵⁴ http://ec.europa.eu/enlargement/enlargement_process/accesion_process/criteria/index_en.htm

⁵⁵ E.g. <http://www.hrw.org/en/news/2004/06/14/turkey-eu-bid-hinges-further-rights-reforms>

⁵⁶ Actually, the ‘Kurdish question’ was first named as such as early as 1930 – for a brief review of the history of the concept of the ‘Kurdish question’ and its internationalization (sic), see Scalbert-Yücel and Le Ray 2007, paras.12ff. The Kurdish question is also referred to in this paper in terms of the ‘southeast’, i.e. conflating geopolitical and ethnic specifications, and obviously assuming a Turkish national perspective based on a status quo (i.e. not a pan-Kurdish, or Kurdish separatist).

human rights associations, on the other. Instead of working in cooperation with established human rights associations, the newly developing state institutional structures appear to be challenging them for authority over the 'truth' concerning human rights in Turkey, especially regarding the Kurdish question. The majority of severe human rights violations inside Turkey has been and is still related to the unresolved Kurdish issue and the ongoing armed conflict with the Kurdistan Workers Party (PKK).⁵⁷ However, the new state-centric institutional bodies that are being created are thus far unwilling to seriously address these violations, instead prioritizing the presentation of a positive image of Turkey's human rights reforms. These government institutions are thus developing parallel to and in competition with existing human rights associations.

This paper examines these dynamics. First, I examine the roots of the current human rights-institutionalization process. I link this process primarily to pressure from the European Union: when EU policies created new political capital for human rights, the Turkish government and state officials began to tackle the question of human rights violations more vigorously and, from 2001 on, enact serious legal reforms (Eralp 2006, Arat 2007). The Turkish state consequently had to start to engage civil society actors in the development of its new public policy. In the area of human rights, this meant that state institutions now had to work closely with exactly those associations that constituted some of their fiercest critics, some of which had been considered as actually undermining the state's policies, if not thought of as straight-forwardly advocating separatism.

Second, I examine the nature and workings of a new government human rights body: the Human Rights Council of Turkey, which operates mainly as a co-operative arrangement between state officials (the Human Rights President at the national level, and the provincial governorships in the provincial and sub-provincial boards) and state-friendly NGOs. An examination of this council and the way it works suggests that the government attempted to extricate itself from the predicament of having to work with civil society actors it viewed as a threat by incorporating only those actors that did not challenge the state's reproduction of itself or the meaning people are expected attach to it (Migdal 2001: 150). In particular, those NGOs perceived as contributing to the Kurdish nationalist movement and considered part of the DTP-led (and PKK inspired) alternative state-building project in the southeastern municipalities are largely excluded from the state-centric institutionalization process.

⁵⁷ E.g. assessments of newspapers that are being closed down and journalists and intellectuals that are being prosecuted (to be found on <http://bianet.org/english/freedom-of-expression/117182-bias-second-quarterly-media-report>) reveal that half of the papers and journalists that are targeted are the ones who have been publicizing extensively on the Kurdish issue. In particular those people who have made explicit references to the speeches of leading figures within the PKK have been subject to investigation and/or prosecution. Amnesty International has been criticizing Turkey of an 'entrenched culture of impunity' (<http://www.amnestyusa.org/document.php?id=ENGEUR440082007&lang=e>), which dates back to the 1980s coup and the consequent war during the 1990s.

Third, I look at the balance of power between the government-sponsored human rights institutions and what we may think of as 'traditional' human rights associations. On the one hand, the former authority of the established human rights associations is to some degree eroding due to shifts in patterns of relations between these associations and EU institutions, which now rely less on traditional human rights associations due to the increasing capacity of the European institutions inside Turkey. In addition, the politicization⁵⁸ of the established human rights associations has become a matter of concern for the European Commission.

On the other hand, a significant part of the social-political space created over the years by domestic human rights associations remains intact, and the government's efforts at a human rights 'take-over' is actively contested. And, in fact, the established human rights associations still possess a number of advantages over the new state institutions in their ability to set the human rights agenda and determine the discourse for civil liberties and justice in the southeast.

Although this particular paper looks at national-level political dynamics, it offers a useful window onto studying some of the ways state-society relations in the southeast have shaped political dynamics throughout the country. EU pressure to have Turkey conform to European human rights standards was instigated in good part by the pre-1999 realities of the southeast, where the state's counter-guerilla warfare had been accompanied by many human rights violations. This EU attention – and the government's efforts to 'officialize' human rights processes in Turkey – was one response to the activities and pressure of domestic and international human rights organizations and Kurdish diaspora activists who had largely focused on these violations that were taking place in Kurdish-majority provinces of the southeast. All these actors sought to link the Kurdish issue and human rights frames, and to achieve international political and judicial recognition for their grievances and claims. This same linkage, however, came with great complications for the broader human rights reforms and institutionalization process.

⁵⁸ Politicization refers here to the difficulties of maintaining one's neutrality towards the warring parties when confronted with the domestic context of an ongoing armed conflict. Within several domestic human rights organizations there have been and still are divisions over the question of how to address human rights violations in relation to the conflict between the Turkish state and the PKK. These discussions are all the more difficult as within the boards of a number of organizations there is a continuous pressure to incorporate representatives of a number of political parties (Emir Ali Türkmen, personal interview, 17 January 2009, Ankara) that leads to a politicized discourse of some of the human rights defenders that reflects itself in their reports and media interventions (personal observations). However, civil society organizations in Turkey suffer more generally from being politicized, as many endorse a specific ideological outlook and often do not tolerate the right to existence of alternative ideological perspectives (Çaylak 2008).

1. The roots of the current institutionalization process

Understanding the current institutional challenge and its effects on human rights associations in Turkey requires a brief summary of Turkey's human rights position and policy. Historically, Turkey was among the 48 countries that voted for and signed the Universal Declaration of Human Rights adopted by the United Nations General Assembly in Paris, 1948; it is recognized as among the 12 founder-members of the Council of Europe in 1949, and thus one of the 14 signatory countries to the Convention for the Protection of Human Rights and Fundamental Freedoms in 1950, which it ratified four years later. However, 'human rights' as such did not enter the country's political agenda before the 1980s, when systemic repression and human rights violations including torture and extrajudicial killings began to attract domestic and international attention.

The Turkish state's problem with human rights during the post-1980 period has to be understood specifically in the context of the violent conflict with the PKK in the southeast⁵⁹, but also, and more generally, in light of the existence of a 'security regime' based upon intimate relations between the political institutions and the institutions responsible for security related issues, and the meta-ideology they share. In this ideology national security is the central concept that justifies interventions in all possible domains of social activities (Dorronsoro 2005: 22-23, Sakallioğlu-Cizre 2003, Cizre 2008). The state-centric conceptualization of domestic sovereignty in Turkey is constructed around a hegemonic nationalist mythology of existential threat, one perceived as ever present since the war of independence, coming both from without and within, and actually based on a still insecure sense of identity (Kentel 2011). Tellingly, it presumes the citizens' first duty as to safeguard the integrity of the republic, which is at odds with the more inclusive and pluralistic culture of democratic tolerance promoted by the European Union through the 1950 European Convention on Human Rights.⁶⁰ The emphasis in the EU approach lies on the responsibility of the state to protect the rights of its individual citizens, instead of vice versa, as is the case with the cultural ideology of Kemalist Turkey (Eralp 2006). As explained in the analysis of the making of Turkish 'state-centric modernity' (Keyman & İçduygu 2005: 5):

"[...] while giving the masses political rights, [the Kemalist elite] demanded at the same time that they accord normative primacy to the national interest over individual freedoms, to duties over rights, and to state sovereignty over individual autonomy. Thus, the making of the modern Turkey involved the transformation of masses into citizens, but prevented the language of rights from entering into the process of the construction of secular national identity" (Keyman & İçduygu 2005: 6).

⁵⁹ The (recent) 'war on terrorism' reminds us how easily liberties are rolled back 'in the national interest' during times of conflict, even in the (relatively) liberal West.

⁶⁰ This largely follows the UN Declaration (in Section I, Articles 2-12), with additions for internal EU procedures (Sections II-V), and (five) subsequent Protocols (1963-66) elaborating on these. (<http://www.hri.org/docs/ECHR50.html>).

Nevertheless, Turkey's disturbing human rights record came increasingly under the scrutiny of international human rights associations following the 1980 coup, (e.g. Cizre 2001) and from 1986 onward this was reinforced by the first homegrown Human Rights Organization, the *İnsan Hakkları Derneği* (İHD), parent organization to TİHV. Established in Ankara, İHD originated from the engagement of leftist professionals and intellectuals and the relatives of the political activists imprisoned during and following the 1980-1983 military rule (Çalı 2007, Türkmen 2003). İHD publicized the plight and conditions of the still thousands of political prisoners to the outside world and was in contact with Amnesty International, which was monitoring the conditions of the detention of the political prisoners and publicly advocating their cause.

During the mid- and late-1980s the effects of military rule were still very much in evidence – there were no trade unions or leftist political parties left at the time of İHD's founding, for example – and the emerging human rights associations thus came to occupy an anti-authoritarian space offering one of the few vehicles through which people could engage in criticism of the official state ideology and policies (Çalı 2007, Türkmen 2003). Human rights defenders in Turkey therefore easily came to be seen as leftist-communists and therefore a threat to the state, especially in an environment in which the Turkish military was promoting the Turkish-Islamic synthesis as a buffer to socialist movements and ideas.

From the beginning of the 1990s onwards the Kurdish question came to dominate the agenda of the human rights associations (Emir Ali Türkmen, personal interview, 17 January 2009)⁶¹, with the PKK replacing the left as the greatest perceived threat to the integrity and unity of the Turkish state.⁶² New national human rights associations were set up such as TİHV, a foundation that specialized in the rehabilitation of victims of torture, and the Organization of Human Rights and Solidarity for Oppressed People, *İnsan Hakları ve Mazlumlar İçin Dayanışma Derneği* (Mazlum-Der), known to have a more Islamic-inspired approach. The new associations obviously focused on abuses in the southeast, an emphasis that continues to this day.⁶³ Together with international human rights associations, including those related to the Kurdish diaspora in Europe (e.g. the London-based Kurdish Human Rights Project, KHRP, founded in 1992)⁶⁴, groups

⁶¹ Türkmen is former İHD secretary-general.

⁶² It has to be noted that for some organizations, such as Mazlum-Der, as much attention was devoted to the headscarf issue as to the Kurdish issue. In its defense of its position on the headscarf Mazlum-Der received support from İHD (Çaylak 2008).

⁶³ For instance, Mazlum-Der lists three problem areas: religious freedoms, migration and the Kurdish issue (<http://www.Mazlum-Der.org>). TİHV has three branches in Ankara, Istanbul, and Diyarbakır, while almost half of İHD's branches (13 of 29) are in the East and Southeast Region, and only 5 of its 17 Special Reports dating back to 2001 cover events and issues outside of that area (and one of those five investigating the confinement conditions on İmrâlı Prison of PKK leader Abdullah Öcalan).

⁶⁴ <http://www.khrp.org/>

like İHD and TİHV have played an important role in the recording and publication of human rights violations in the country (see e.g. Watts 2004, Adamson 2001).⁶⁵

The voices of these associations came to be heard by civil society associations and politicians in Europe, especially during the 1990s when the number of serious human rights violations in the Kurdish southeastern provinces of Turkey sky-rocketed. Consequently human rights turned into a matter of concern with regard to Turkey's applications for membership to the European Union. In 1989 Turkey's failure to respect the human rights of its citizens was amongst the reasons cited for the rejection of its application (Doc. SEC (89) 2290); in 1996 Turkey's human rights record was a reason given for the European Parliament's objection to Turkey's entry into the EU Customs Union, and similarly, at the Luxemburg Summit of 1997, the poor human rights situation played a significant role in Turkey's rejection as a candidate. Since the green light for its candidacy was given in 1999, and for the negotiations in 2005, respect for human rights has been addressed continuously in the relations between Turkey and the European Union (Doc. 2008/157/EC).⁶⁶

Until the end of the 1990s the nationally based human rights associations, in particular İHD and TİHV, held a kind of exclusivity over the registration, publication and prosecution of human rights violations in Turkey. These particularly concerned violations suffered by Kurdish political activists and their families during the violent phases of the armed conflict at the end of the 1980s through the mid-1990s. İHD quickly became the address for international human rights associations like Amnesty International and Human Rights Watch for information on developments in the Kurdish inhabited provinces under the State of Emergency Law, *Olağanüstü Hal* (OHAL). The İHD branch at Diyarbakır operated as the central branch for the southeastern predominantly Kurdish provinces, with human rights violations in the region being reported there and then passed on to Ankara or (directly) to international associations (Nazmi Gür, former president of İHD Van Branch and former member of İHD Diyarbakır, personal interview, 15 January 2009, Ankara). From 1992 the branch of Diyarbakır started to cooperate extensively with KHRP to bring cases before the European Court of Human Rights (ECHR) in Strasbourg.

⁶⁵ This is not to decry the role of other NGOs oriented to specific types or aspects of human rights but involved in civil life generally, notably the labor unions and professional associations. Unions recently they have been involved in the government's attempt to tackle the Kurdish question, as has the Union (Federation) of Turkish Bar Associations, *Türkiye Barolar Birliği* (TBB), established in 1938 (http://www.gazeteport.com.tr/SIYASET/NEWS/GP_520421).

⁶⁶ The first, and indeed only substantive point made in the formal decision to open accession negotiations at the December 2004 summit (conveyed in the Presidency Conclusions of the Brussels European Council) retrospectively 'welcomed the decisive progress made by Turkey in its far-reaching reform process' and stated its expectation that Turkey ensure the irreversibility of the political reform process and its full, effective and comprehensive implementation, notably with regard to fundamental freedoms and to full respect of human rights...' (Doc. 16238/1/04 REV 1: para.18).

Human rights activism employed through the ECHR played an important role in the recent legal development of fundamental freedoms. Turkey finally recognized the right of individual petition to the ECHR in 1987, the year that saw – in addition to Turkey’s formal application to the EU – the instatement of OHAL, which ‘initiated a period of grave human rights violations committed by security forces against Kurdish civilians, leading to a rapid increase in the number of petitions filed with the ECHR’ and as a result of which ‘it was initially for Kurds that the European human rights law offered an alternative arena for rights-based litigation’ (Kurban et al. 2008: 3).⁶⁷

In total, Turkey was found to have violated human rights in almost 1,700 cases brought before the European Court of Human Rights during the decade 1999-2008 (with a further 200 settled out of court, combining to account for all but 16 of the judgments made) (ECHR 2009a: 139).⁶⁸ The judgments found against Turkey directly affected the laws and practices inside the country as the jurisprudence of the ECHR had to be incorporated into the national laws in order to prevent similar violations in the future (Smith 2008). The ECHR therefore was instrumental in the reform of Turkish legal system, leading to reforms in pre-trial detention, trial procedures, freedom of expression, and freedom of assembly and association (see also Adamson 2001; Watts 2004).

Turkish state authorities for the most part denied accusations of human rights abuses until the middle of the 1990s. Typically, the government would accuse its foreign critics of illegitimate involvement in internal affairs and support of separatism (see e.g. Çalı 2007: 222). Human rights defenders in the country faced prosecution, imprisonment, torture, and death.⁶⁹

⁶⁷ Dilek Kurban is an officer with the democratization program at the Turkish Economic and Social Studies Foundation [*Türkiye Ekonomik ve Sosyal Etüdler Vakfı*, TESEV] and co-author of the organization’s recent Roadmap publication, which makes wide-ranging proposals for solving the Kurdish question (Ensaroğlu & Kurban 2008). The TESEV Roadmap’s other co-author, Yılmaz Ensaroğlu, Mazlum-Der co-representative on the steering committee of the Human Rights Joint Platform [*İnsan Hakları Ortak Platformu*, İHOP], a human rights umbrella group formed in the mid-90s and also representing/comprising İHD and the local (Turkish) branches of two international organizations, Amnesty International, *Uluslararası Af Örgütü - Türkiye* (UAÖ) and the Helsinki Citizens’ Assembly, *Helsinki Yurttaşlar Derneği* (YYD) – <http://www.ihop.org.tr>; <http://www.amnesty.org.tr>; <http://www.hyd.org.tr>.

⁶⁸ These figures represent about 20% of all the violations determined by the Court during this period (and, indeed, during its 50 year history), the most of any of the 47 countries that have signed up to the European Convention and thus fall under the Court’s jurisdiction. Some 10,000 applications remain currently pending (ECHR 2009b: 78). (<http://www.tesev.org.tr>)

⁶⁹ The İHD website currently lists 23 ‘murdered executives and members,’ ten of the twelve victims with details listed having been members of branches in the southeast. Members of other NGOs, such as the president of the Diyarbakır-based human rights group Society for the Assistance and Support of Families of the Disappeared [with Lost Loved Ones], *Yakınlarını Kaybeden Ailelerle Yardımlaşma ve Dayanışma Derneği* (YAKAYDER) have also faced prosecution.

From the EU Customs Union Protocol in 1995-1996 onwards, however, the state engaged in 'tactical concessions' (Cizre 2001), entering into a dialogue with internal and international critics about various accusations. These concessions were instrumental and strategic, in order to gain military and economic support. Thus, while certain abuses were recognized, they were presented as the aberrant behavior of particular individuals rather than part of a systematic policy (Cizre 2001: 68). In 1997, under Refah deputy Haşim Haşimi, the parliamentary Human Rights Commission wrote the first report that openly criticized the consequences of the counter-insurgency measures in the Kurdish provinces, bringing many human rights violations to light. As Haşimi stated while reading the minutes of his speech in the Turkish General Assembly of 2nd of June 1998:

"There are natural catastrophes that you, as a state, cannot do anything about, but there are human catastrophes that you as a state can do something about... Whose power has evacuated the people? Thousands of people fled to the outskirts of the city and the *gecekondus* [shantytowns]. Who has forced them to live this life? Who has brought them to [own nothing but] a piece of bread?" (Haşim Haşimi, personal interview, 20 September 2007, Diyarbakır).

It was when the politics of denial ended after the 1990s and important legal reforms undertaken that the government decided to establish an institutional human rights body in order to integrate the protection of human rights into the state administration. By 2004, provincial and sub-provincial human rights boards had been established under what came to be called the Human Rights Presidency of Turkey.

2. The particularities of the new institutional body

"There is one positive effect of the [new] institutions: the government is using the word human rights all the time and the symbols of human rights are all over the walls of their buildings." (Hüsnü Öndül, personal interview, January 2009, Ankara).

Following its victory in the November 2002 election, the AK Party (AKP) government not only accelerated the pace of democratization but also initiated a process aimed at institutionalizing the protection of human rights in the state administration. Concretely, the government organized an organizational and legislative establishment consisting of a national structure for dealing with violations. This was made up of local and provincial boards [*kurular*] headed by the provincial governors and coordinated by a central government department; the Human Rights Presidency of Turkey, answerable to the prime ministry [*Başbakanlık İnsan Hakları Başkanlığı*], under which subsumed various

other bodies, such as a think tank known as the human rights advisory board; and the 'Human Rights Council of Turkey' [*Türkiye İnsan Hakları Kurumu*].⁷⁰

At first glance there were reasons for optimism about the new human rights institutional structure. Made up of local elected representatives, academics, lawyers, politicians, professional bodies, journalists, NGOs, and trade unions, the boards were tasked with monitoring human rights-related legislative reforms and their implementation in the country, and instructed to investigate complaints about human rights abuses filed by citizens and forward their findings to the prosecutor. A Human Rights Advisory Board was established to provide a platform for consultation and information exchange between academics, NGOs and other civil society actors dealing with human rights.⁷¹ Thus, an integration of (local) civil society actors and formalized recognition of civilian democratic oversight seemed central in the new human rights policy in Turkey.

However, those NGOs that have openly criticized state practices and its ideological underpinnings have been excluded from – and excluded themselves from – the institutionalization process. To give but one example of the skepticism that abounds amongst Turkey's human rights defenders, the TİHV-General Secretary testified:

"There is no political will to enhance the cooperation between the civil society and the state authorities. What they do is no more than window-dressing. For example, we get lots of invitations for meetings. Lately, after a meeting of Babacan [Turkey's Minister of Foreign Affairs and chief EU-negotiator for Turkey until January 2009] with many NGOs, the NGOs had to leave the premises when Babacan gave his briefing to the press" (Metin Bakalcı, personal interview, 22 January 2009, Ankara).

The human rights boards from the start suffered a legitimacy problem in the eyes of national and international human rights associations. First of all, the boards were organized under the prime minister and run by the provincial governors. This was not in line with the Paris Principles which sets out the need for national human rights institutions to be independent.⁷² Now the same provincial governors representing the state and in charge of the police were charged with investigating violations of human rights perpetrated by the state and its security forces. Furthermore, in the whole process of institutionalization and protection of human rights and the drafting of the laws that were needed for its regulation, the traditional human rights associations were not consulted, and have complained that they are excluded from the negotiations.

⁷⁰ The Human Rights Presidency (department) was established in 2001, and can perhaps best be described as a work in progress. For organizational schema, see <http://www.ihb.gov.tr/teskilat/ihb-organizasyon-semasi.pdf> and http://www.ihb.gov.tr/ENGLISH/organization_table_hrp.xls.

⁷¹ For a more extensive overview of the changing conditions of these developments see Çalı, B. (2007).

⁷² <http://www2.ohchr.org/english/law/parisprinciples.htm>

At the same time, however, the established human rights associations have always taken an anti-establishment position and have been hesitant to cooperate with local officials, even when considering them necessary for the fulfillment of their aims (Tocci & Kaliber 2008). Consequently, these associations have also refused to take part in the boards. They have criticized the ways in which the government tried to introduce the new human rights bodies, and in May 2009 TİHV and the four associations affiliated with the Human Rights Joint Platform, or *İnsan Hakları Ortak Platformu*, known as İHOP, signed a strongly worded rejection of the latest draft law on a reformed Human Rights Council. In addition to stating their opposition to being included in a process of ‘anti-democratic implementation, which can be considered also as a human rights violation’, they also criticized the composition of the boards as failing to meet the terms set by the ministry and as being, ultimately, ‘problematic and functionless.’⁷³

Initially, some of the established human rights associations such as TİHV did take part in the Human Rights Advisory Board that was established, but that involvement ended following its first report (since which the Advisory Board has not been operative). Tellingly, that first report dealt indirectly with the Kurdish problem, in that it attempted to tackle a practical political problem concerning the vocabulary of identity. The Turkish word *Türk* has a double meaning, referring both to ethnicity and nationality, which is obviously problematic for politically sensitized Kurds in particular, who, given their raised nationalist consciousness, may identify themselves as Turkish by citizenship but not by ethnicity. In order to distinguish the two, and move away from prejudicial language, the report prepared by professors İbrahim Kaboğlu and Baskın Oran used the concept of ‘*Türkiyelilik*’, which means ‘being from Turkey.’ However, the academics were charged with ‘denigrating Turkishness’ and inciting people to enmity and hatred under Articles 301 and 216 of the Turkish Penal Code. This was followed by the dismissal of fourteen members of the board, after which the chairman and many other intellectuals resigned.⁷⁴

⁷³ The statement refers to the 2007 report that the stipulation of a minimum 3 human rights associations and maximum 2 state personnel members are included on each board is not met in some provinces. At: http://www.ihop.org.tr/english/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=101:the-draft-law-on-establishment-of-human-rights-council-of-turkey-must-be-withdrawn-immediately-&catid=1 (English); and <http://www.hyd.org.tr/?pid=728> (Turkish).

⁷⁴ The still incomplete legal process here testifies to the complexity of intra-state relations (i.e. within the judicial system) in the case of indictments under contested legislation, as well as the problem in this context of timely resolution. Initially the charges against Kaboğlu and Oran under 301 were dropped on the determination of the Justice Minister, and the defendants were to be acquitted from the 216 charge. Then the Supreme Court of Appeals 8th Penal Circuit overturned the acquittal decision regarding 216. However, the Chief Prosecutor of the Supreme Court of Appeals intervened and the case went to the Court of Appeal’s Plenary Penal Committee, which confirmed the original acquittal decision (in April 2008, four years after the report was made public). However, later that year the 28th Criminal Court of First Instance sent the file to the Justice Ministry for permission to try it under Article 301 following a failed attempt by the accused to have it sent to the Constitutional Court (Önderoğlu 2008a, 2008b).

A closer look at the NGOs participating in the human rights boards reveals the nature of the new institutional structure. Membership of NGOs on the boards is upon the invitation of the provincial governors, who, as representatives of the state, could be expected to be loyal to the official ideology. And indeed, the NGO representation found on the Human Rights boards does consist primarily of members of NGOs working within the confines of the state's ideology, including some that are actively engaged in its promotion such as the *Atatürk Düşünce Derneği* [ADD, Atatürk Thought Association], *Türk Dünyası İnsan Hakları Derneği* [Turkic World Human Rights Foundation], *Türk Ocakları Derneği* [Turkish Hearths Foundation], *Şehit Aileleri Derneği* [Association for the Families of Martyred Soldiers] and *Türk Anneleri Derneği* [Association of Turkish Mothers].⁷⁵ They also tend to be less than focused on human rights, which makes them questionable choices for the Human Rights boards. Indeed, a UN Special Representative in 2004 judged the selection of NGOs for participation in the Human Rights boards to be based on 'political affiliation' and 'other extraneous considerations' (Jilani 2005).

The characteristics of the NGOs that are members of the Human Rights boards have particular implications for the protection and promotion of human rights as related to the Kurdish question. The institutional bias of some of these organizations in respect to this issue and the stance they could be expected to take on the boards is quite apparent. In the case of the more overtly nationalist organizations – like *Atatürk Düşünce Derneği*, *Türk Dünyası İnsan Hakları Derneği*, and *Türk Ocakları* – and in the case of *Şehit Aileleri Derneği*, the list of soldiers lost ('martyrs') and their date and place of death, i.e. overwhelmingly in the southeast during the 1990s figures on their websites.⁷⁶

These associations portray a suspicious, hostile and sometimes demonized image of Kurdish and human rights associations. They tend to be suspicious of the motives and aims of human rights groups that address the Kurdish question (and, by extension, Kurdish associations in general), considering them to be appropriating the language of rights in the pursuit of a hidden agenda that could endanger the national unity and security, and even as operating merely as legal representatives of the PKK (Tocci & Kaliber 2008: 13). The idea that İHD is biased and defends the rights and freedoms of Kurds, including terrorists, but not the primary right to life of murdered Turkish soldiers and their families is also widespread. Historically and ideologically, these organizations have upheld a civic or assimilationist approach to the Kurdish question, prioritizing individual rights and denying the existence of a Kurdish collectivity legitimately demanding collective rights (ibid.: 24).

Predictably perhaps, the attitude of distrust found among the member NGOs of the human rights boards is shared by the president of the human rights presidency

⁷⁵ Along with representatives from other groups, like *Türk Kadınlar Birliği* [Turkish Women's Union], *Umut Çocukları Derneği* [Children of Hope], *Diyabetle Yaşam Derneği* [Living with Diabetes] and *Çagdas Yasama Destekleme Derneği* [Foundation for the Advancement of Contemporary Life].

⁷⁶ www.add.org.tr; <http://turkdunyasihd.org>; www.sehitaileleri.org.tr

coordinating the human rights boards, Professor Hasan Fendoğlu, who expresses the view that the human rights associations failed to join the boards because of their 'unwillingness', as they would think of the boards as 'competition', and suggests that they are not really representative of the nation as a whole but, on the contrary, part of Kurdish nationalist politics:

"Human rights organizations here are different than in Europe because in Europe NGOs support the state. In Turkey, however, certain NGOs want to separate from the state. The DTP took 5 percent of the votes of the Turkish people. They are small but their voice is strong, [while] the majority is big but has not got a [national] human rights organization. Concerning human rights, it is said that they are communist and Turkish people have not established a human rights organization. In the future we might have new NGOs." (Hasan Fendoğlu, personal interview, 22 January 2009, Ankara).⁷⁷

The absence of the established domestic human rights associations in the new institutions weakens Turkey's human rights institutionalization process. These associations have developed expertise in the documentation and publication of human rights violations and the assistance of victims over the years. İHD and Mazlum-Der have their own networks of lawyers with whom they work. Since the beginning of the 1990s these associations have also supported victims by taking their cases to Strasbourg, supported by KHRP, which has provided legal training to the human rights defenders and lawyers working for the associations (Kerim Yıldız, personal interview, January 2008, London). The human rights boards, on the other hand, suffer from a lack of expertise (as acknowledged in their own 2007 report and in many of the interviews of the author). While the expertise build up by the domestic organizations remains under-utilized, the boards have tried to develop their own capacity building with financial support from the European Union and some of its member states.

The boards' data collection and public reporting seems to be a relative strength of the Human Rights Presidency, which has published fairly full sets of figures.⁷⁸ According to the report, the statistics should demonstrate the implementation of reform, showing progress or failure concerning human rights. However, the report offers a clearly biased logic in the relative accounting for desirable and undesirable trends. For example, the report argues that an increase in the reported number of formal complaints related to ill treatment while in custody can be accounted for as indicating a rise in public awareness of the boards, rather than an actual increase in the number of people suffering ill treatment at the hands of security forces. However, other data showing a decrease in complaints (e.g. related to torture and freedom of expression), is taken as evidence that

⁷⁷ Originating from the southeastern province of Elazığ, Fendoğlu was previously project director for the state Human Rights in Turkey Reform Implementation Support Project, and has authored various relevant publications such as the recent European Commission sponsored overview, 'Turkey in the [New] Millennium, Human Rights and the EU', with a foreword by PM Erdoğan (Fendoğlu 2007).

⁷⁸ See a full report, in English (PMHRP 2008)); a short (6-page) untitled statistical listing, in English (Altıntaş 2009: 6); and a fuller (17-page) statistical bulletin, in Turkish (BİHB 2008: 8).

the problems in these areas have decreased and the measures taken (to prevent torture) are proving successful (HR 2007: 20, 23).

More generally, the number of citizen complaints – less than 5,000 formal complaints for the whole four-year period – appears rather low. For instance, it is less than half the number of cases filed against Turkey pending at the ECHR (see note 17). The greatest numbers of the formal complaints concern alleged violations regarding the right to health and property (totaling almost 20 percent of the complaints). The violations for which Turkey received the most international and domestic attention are related to rights concerning freedom of thought and expression, freedom of association, and freedom of assembly and demonstration, and these all ranked in the bottom third of the thirty rights categories listed by the Presidency data presentation. The words of the Human Rights President himself also reflect the need to appease the criticisms of the outsiders, while at the same time they reflect the ongoing ‘security regime’, as he tried to reassure the author:

“In Turkey, there is freedom of expression. You can criticize the army, the president, the government and the parliament, but what you cannot do is insult them... In the last six months our Minister of Justice gave permission to prosecute in 70 cases related with article 301 and he was right to do so. I know that, because I’ve monitored these cases and they were rightfully prosecuted. Today freedom of expression has improved. There is only some homework left to be done” (Hasan Fendoğlu, personal interview, 22 January 2009, Ankara).

Clearly, the new institutional bodies and the traditional human rights associations have contesting claims as to the ‘truth’ of the nature and the number of human rights violations in today’s Turkey. Whereas the Human Rights President and the Boards appear to downplay violations of the freedom of expression and the existence of torture, the traditional human rights associations such as İHD present strikingly different priorities and figures. Regarding torture, for example, the report of the Human Rights Presidency indicates for the year 2007 a total number of 29 cases of torture and 133 cases of ill treatment, totaling 162 (HR Report 2007: 16-17). İHD, on the other hand, reports 678 cases of torture and ill treatment for the year 2007 (İHD 2008), in one year outnumbering the 461 cases the human rights presidency attests for the whole period 2004-7. Similarly, with regards to freedom of expression the human rights presidency’s report indicates a total of 5 cases for 2007 in which freedom of expression was violated (HR Report 2007: 16). İHD’s report, on the other hand, states that in 2007, 190 court cases had been filed involving 1232 persons. The İHD report further finds that about 369 people were convicted in 2007 and given prison sentences and penal fines in cases deemed to be in violation of the freedom of expression (İHD 2008).⁷⁹

⁷⁹The evaluation of these governmental and non-governmental reports’ numbers is somewhat complicated by the fact that neither side’s reports clearly define ‘torture’, ‘ill treatment’ or ‘freedom of expression.’

Finally, there is a lack of engagement among the Presidency and its boards with the Kurdish question. There are no geographical tables to show where applications were made (although there are figures showing the institutions held responsible for human rights violations).⁸⁰ Nor is there any discussion about the rights of ethnic and linguistic minorities, or about questions such as the need for dialogue and reconciliation in the light of the armed conflict. This is in stark contrast to the demands and proposals of the established human rights associations and think tanks. Given the current political climate and recent history, these omissions cannot be seen as inconsequential or accidental, but suggest an effort to redefine human rights in Turkey in a new and 'de-Kurdified' way.

An assessment of the resources of the traditional human rights associations on the one hand, and the Human Rights Presidency and its boards, on the other hand, also highlights the fact that the traditional associations and newly established boards, and, in particular, its member NGOs, constitute competing clusters of organizations. The human rights associations have expertise and a history of intensive cooperation with one another, and they are also embedded into transnational advocacy networks with international human rights associations. Additionally, the human rights associations have found a welcoming work environment at the local level, in particular in those municipalities in the southeast run by the DTP (see Watts, 2006, Gökalp 2007). At the national level, however, the domestic human rights associations have had problems accessing the mainstream media and establishing broader public support (beyond the support they enjoy in the Kurdish-majority southeast and among a small audience, generally the liberal intelligentsia, in the western part of the country). The human rights associations have also experienced difficulties accessing most of Turkey's parliamentary deputies and have been unable to directly affect governmental policies, despite (or because of) their indirect success, for example through the cases brought against Turkey in the ECHR.

Therefore, while the established human rights associations continue to function as advocates for the southeast and (other) minority interests outside the mainstream, nationalist discourse (i.e. Armenian, Christian, Romany, LGBT, etc.) at the national level, the Human Rights Presidency and its boards, as organs of the state, may be better positioned. In other words, a dual system with a dichotomous human rights discourse is developing. This affects relations with the European institutions and all of these entities' claims to speak with authority about the human rights situation inside the country, as illustrated in the following anecdote recalled by human rights lawyer and activist Hakan Ataman:

"There is no positive dialogue. There is a dialogue [with the institutions] about things that do not pose a threat to the state, such as the rights of children and women. However, at the same time, an issue such as rape under custody is something that cannot be

⁸⁰ A table topped by the police and followed by the courts and government ministries (BIHB 2008: 10).

addressed... I attended an EU seminar on human rights and torture. During the workshop an enormous dispute burst out between state officials and human rights defenders. No solution was found and there was a total lack of dialogue” (Hakan Ataman, Secretary General of the Human Rights Agenda Association, personal interview, 16 January 2009, Ankara).

3. Shifting patterns of relations between the EU and human rights associations

Established human rights associations’ ability to control discourse and ‘assert the truth’ about the human rights situation in Turkey is being challenged not only due to internal developments but also due to changes in the patterns of relations between these associations and EU institutions. These changes also in turn affect internal developments, extending their impact and further squeezing the socio-political space the human rights associations have to work in. Two main changes can be noted, one related to the capacities and relative needs of the EU, and the other to EU perceptions of the human rights associations themselves.

First, EU institutions are now more capable of gathering information themselves within Turkey because of their increased capacity. Therefore they rely less on the information provided by Turkey’s established human rights associations. This increased information-gathering capacity was enhanced by the European Commission’s establishment of its permanent delegation to Ankara, and through financial and organizational support provided to pro-democracy think-tanks and other institutions. These now provide information and services to the international agencies. Not only the traditional human rights associations but also international ones such as Amnesty International attest that while the information requested from them peaked in 2004-2006, the demand has now decreased. They attribute this to the extended expertise within the European Commission itself (Personal interview of the author with Jenny Vanderlinden, Turkey Coordinator for Amnesty International Belgium, February 2009).

Turkey’s human rights’ institutionalization process has also enjoyed extensive financial support from the EU. The development of the human rights presidency and its boards came with considerable financial and organizational support from the Council of Europe and other foreign donors, such as the British Foreign and Commonwealth Office, which invested in their own capacities in Turkey as a prospective member. Members of the boards received training; an international symposium was organized and a handbook developed for the board members. Additionally, some projects enjoyed assistance from the United Nations Development Program, UNDP. Linked to this, surely, traditional human rights associations have, by contrast, complained about the waning interest and financial support from European institutions for their activities. As an İHD member argued, ‘Since 2000 the EU has been mostly depending on the official reports of the government’ (Necat Taştan, personal interview, 17 January 2009).

Waning interest and support from Europe for the established human rights associations is not linked solely to the increasing number of alternative organizations and institutions with a presumed expertise on human rights affairs. Some EU representatives now seem to view human rights associations in Turkey more critically, faulting them for perceived structural problems and politicization. As the deputy head of the cabinet of the European Commission's Enlargement Commissioner Olli Rehn testified:

"We cannot be sure about whether or not organizations are related to the PKK since we cannot check for each organization how they are being financed, therefore we base ourselves mostly upon the big international NGOs and their reports [in order to evaluate the reforms related to human rights in Turkey]." (Myriam Verger, deputy head of the cabinet of European Commission's Enlargement Commissioner Olli Rehn, personal interview, 2 July 2007, European Commission, Brussels).

The politicization of these associations has actually been a fact from the very beginning (Çalı 2007, interviews by the author) but only lately does this seem to have become a matter of concern for the members of the European Commission, rendering them skeptical of the data these associations provide and thus decreasing the legitimacy the associations had previously enjoyed. The diminished support for some of the human rights associations can be read from the financial support for human rights projects. Whereas İHD, for example, enjoyed considerable funding in the past, through the grants of the EC's European Instrument for Democracy and Human Rights (EIDHR), today neither the national headquarters nor the regional branches are receiving any funding.⁸¹ Similarly the Association for Assistance and Solidarity with Migrants, *Göç Edenler Yardımlaşma ve Dayanışma Derneği* (GÖÇ-DER) and *Mazlum-Der* – which all received project funding from the EIDHR in 2005 – are no longer supported.⁸²

A number of factors may have contributed to this, not least the changing post 9/11 climate which saw the PKK entering US and European lists of terrorist groups and the raising of European consciousness regarding Turkish complaints about the freedoms allowed to Kurdish diaspora activism on the continent (e.g. the arrests of PKK cadres in France, Germany and (most recently, in March 2009) Spain; and the many house searches of Kurdish activists in the United Kingdom). Another detrimental influence on the human rights cause seems to have been a perception of AKP legitimacy, noted as being the first majority government for a decade and democratic counterweight to the

⁸¹ The EIDHR is an instrument of the European delegation to Turkey of the European Commission, also known as the Ankara delegation to the EC. For details about the projects currently receiving funding: http://www.avrupa.info.tr/Files/eidhr/2008_projects_in_Turkey_en.pdf

⁸² İHD received project funding from EIDHR until 2007 for different projects (on the prevention of torture, the rights of minorities and ethnic groups, anti-mining and the rights of disabled). The total budget of the funded projects amounted to about 300,000 euros, making up for over 80% of the total budgets that were foreseen for these projects. GÖÇ-DER and Mazlum-Der received funding until 2005. For projects on (respectively) human rights education, training and awareness raising and for the support of IDPs see: [http://www.avrupa.info.tr/files/EIDHR_Projects_English\(1\).pdf](http://www.avrupa.info.tr/files/EIDHR_Projects_English(1).pdf)

military and deep state. In addition, a more critical stance towards human rights associations is linked to the reduction in hostilities in the southeast (and its accompanying reduction in human rights violations) and the developing EU-Turkish relationship. Certainly, human rights defenders complain that they have been told by members of EU-delegations that 'while you want Turkey to become a member of the EU, at the same time you are amongst those who work against the accession of Turkey to the European Union' (TİHV Diyarbakir Branch member, personal interview, 29 September 2007). And:

"When we narrated the contents of the reports by İHD to members of the European commission we constantly got the same reply: 'We can't believe it. Are you telling us there are two Turkey's?'... Actually the message was: 'Don't do anything that might put the AKP government into a negative light'" (Necat Taştan, personal interview, 17 January 2009).

"During the meetings with EU-delegations I have noticed myself how uncomfortable they felt when we talked about the problems. I was told that I was too pessimistic, that I should not just focus on the negative things, that this would be in favor of the ones that are opposing Turkey's accession to the European Union, in Europe as well as in Turkey. But that is a wrong attitude. It shows that Turkey is in a comfortable position in the negotiations, as it is able to stay in control" (Ayhan Bilgen, former President of Mazlum-Der, personal interview, 14 January 2009).

Until the commencement of the accession negotiations, though, associations such as İHD were able to affect European policy makers. İHD and Mazlum-Der would actively send representatives of their associations to participate in meetings and conferences within member states of the European Union, as well as in the European Parliament. Sometimes these visits were and are supported financially and organizationally by Kurdish diaspora organizations, who serve as brokers to establish and maintain contacts (Casier 2010). The European Commission and Parliament also sent several delegations to Turkey, and in particular, to the southeastern provinces, to assess the human rights situation, where they made many visits to the local branches of İHD, TİHV and Mazlum-Der. Through these contacts these associations were able to engage in public criticism of the Turkish state and the Turkish government and call for the need to democratize the country.

Today the traditional human rights associations can still count on a moderate level of support from the European Commission, for example through the financial support provided to the Human Rights Platform, İHOP. The İHOP organizations share the idea that the Turkish state and its political system need to democratize in order to be able to guarantee respect for human rights, and are thus politically engaged insofar as they address the root causes of violations, and not just its symptoms. Although traditional human rights associations are still exchanging information with the European Commission's delegation to Ankara, it does seem that the importance given to the

information that is being provided is decreasing.⁸³ Finally, recent efforts by state prosecutors to purge civil society organizations and the DTP of suspected PKK activists have also affected associations such as İHD.

Conclusion: Ongoing contestation over the ability to speak the 'truth' over Turkey's respect for human rights

This paper has looked at how the current institutionalization of human rights protection in Turkey's state administration challenges the established human rights associations' authority over 'the truth' concerning the human rights situation in the country. Given the accession negotiations, the Turkish government is highly motivated to uphold a positive image of its reforms and has, moreover, been pressured to engage more substantially with its civil society actors. However, the institutionalization of human rights has been achieved in such a way as to lend the state institutions the image of thorough cooperation with a wide range of civil society actors, while in reality excluding actors that threaten the state's reproduction of itself. The lower levels of the new institutional structure, the local and provincial boards, have been shown to consist primarily of organizations and associations that work for and within the confines of the Turkish state ideology and its practices that have been repudiated by the established human rights associations. Furthermore, not only have these associations been excluded from the institutionalization process but they are suffering a decreasing credibility in the eyes of EU officials, who have come to rely increasingly on alternative resources and, moreover, who criticized human rights defenders for being engaged in politics and obstructing Turkey's membership.

The institutionalization of human rights protection appears to be repackaging human rights within the ideological framework of the Turkish Republic, with the development of a state-friendly human rights sector operating in the context of ongoing EU accession negotiations. Thus, in spite of negotiations and the consequent capacity-building in Turkey for the protection of human rights, the last decade has seen the coming into existence of alternative institutions that threaten the existing ones and have partially silenced their voices.

Notwithstanding this critique, however, there is also an ongoing negotiation at play between the established human rights associations and the governmental bodies as the human rights associations have, over the years, created a space for themselves in the socio-political landscape, in particular at the local (municipal) and the international scale, which they have to a certain extent been able to maintain. Compared with the newly established human rights institutions, the traditional associations still possess expertise, inclusion in transnational advocacy networks, and are – though under

⁸³ This was emphasized in several interviews by the author with long time human rights defenders, January 2009 in Ankara and in Diyarbakir, in September 2007 and March 2008.

pressure – consulted and to some extent supported by the same EU institutions that support official human rights institutionalization efforts. Part of the space the established human rights associations have created since the 1980s remains intact, albeit somewhat marginalized.

Both sides in this emerging dualistic system can be regarded as having gained from the EU – and not just its financial support. Signaling the importance of a broad cooperation with civil society and pressing both the government and the civil society organizations to enter into dialogue, the European Commission, has – ironically perhaps – effectively created a structural opportunity for the human rights associations to criticize the government. Insofar as they have refused to take part in the provincial and local boards and have been left off the Human Rights Advisory Board the associations have taken a position from which they attempt to affect the institutionalization process. Their refusal to be involved in the particular way the institutionalization is developing constitutes a strategy for denying the new institutions the legitimacy that they would gain by incorporating the established human rights associations. This explains why the national offices of the main human rights groups determined not to enter into cooperative relationships with the new governmental bodies even though locally, in the boards, some associations have left it up to the choice of their local branches whether or not to cooperate (Ayse Bilgen, Mazlum-Der vice-president, personal interview, 19 January 2009 and Hüsni Öndül, İHD representative for İHOP, 20 January 2009, Ankara).

This strategy appears fruitful. Since the start of the institutionalization process the composition of the boards has been changed – specifically, the heads of the police and the secret services have been excluded from the boards after criticisms from the human rights associations and the INGOs, and the government has not (yet) managed to establish the new Human Rights Council as it is against the will of the established human rights associations. However, these gains have also been small and not sufficient to meet the demands of independence that the traditional human rights associations, backed by the INGOs and the Council of Europe's directives, have been demanding.

The ways in which the institutionalization process is currently developing – that is, in exclusion of the traditional human rights associations and thus developing towards a separate, state-centric human rights body – risks reinforcing the divide in state-society relations in the area of human rights. The state-led human rights institutionalization, which the EU institutions reckoned would reinforce cooperation between state and societal organizations, might thus, on the contrary, turn out to contribute to their ongoing differences. This is the case even though the process might, at the same time, increase the level of integration of different actors into a separate competing cluster of organizations. With regards to the southeastern branches of an organization such as İHD, non-engagement – which has shown itself still a form of engagement – reconfirms the alignment of the association's relations with the local DTP authorities, engaged in an alternative project of state-building (see Watts, this issue) that is very much based upon

an anti-statist discourse. What should be clear, though, is that the current human rights institutionalization process has mutually transformative effects on both state and society. It affects the already existing political dividing lines within Turkey's civil society and between state and society actors, and by doing so complicates the ways in which the discourse on human rights is being appropriated in the contest over speaking the 'truth' over the (dis)respect for human rights in Turkey.

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5. Designated terrorists. The PKK's struggle to (re)gain political legitimacy⁸⁴

Abstract

The European Union designation of the Kurdistan Workers' Party as an international terrorist organization has led to a profound distrust of the EU on the part of the PKK. This has resulted in a perception that the Kurdish organization has turned against the EU and withdrawn its support for Turkey's accession. The PKK activities and viewpoints as presented and discussed in this article, however, indicate that this is not the case. Politically squeezed at home and sidelined abroad, it is argued, the PKK is, in fact, primarily concerned to (re)gain recognition as a representative of Turkey's Kurds (upon which it is making its support for Turkey's accession conditional).

Introduction

As of 2002, the Kurdistan Workers' Party (*Partiya Karkerên Kurdistan*, the PKK) found itself designated an international terrorist organization. The international proscription of the PKK that came with its entry onto the EU, US and UK terrorist lists constituted the beginning of a new era for the main actor in Turkey's Kurdish nationalist movement. Having waged an insurgency war against the Turkish state since 1984, the PKK had long been branded 'terrorist' by the Turkish state, and the civil disruption and criminality associated with the organization and its affiliates in Europe had led Germany and France to order the closure of the organization's branches in their territories during the mid 1990s. Nevertheless, the classification of the PKK as an international terrorist organization in the wake of September 11th was particularly hard to digest for the party and its followers – so much so that the Europe-based PKK-related organizations have devoted much of their time to divesting themselves of the 'terrorist' stigma and restoring the organization's legitimacy as a social-political movement. To this end, legal and political activities as well as socio-political protest events have been staged in Europe. These activities attest to ongoing (albeit weakening) efforts of the Kurdish nationalist movement's main actor to capitalize on international support, in particular

⁸⁴ This chapter was published as Casier, M. (2010), Designated Terrorists. The Kurdistan Workers' Party and Its Struggle to (Re)Gain Political Legitimacy. *Mediterranean Politics*, 15 (3): 393-413.

with regards to the EU member states and its institutions, which are in continuing negotiations with Turkey over its possible future accession.

This paper bears testimony to a deepening sense of distrust on the part of the PKK towards the EU institutions that had previously served it well, and attests to an ongoing struggle by the former for the creation of a political space that is inclusive of the organization deemed to represent Turkey's most politicized Kurds. Consequently, these findings reject the thesis of Uslu (2008), that since late 2005 the PKK has sought to actively undermine the Turkey-EU accession negotiations. The findings reported here indicate that what has been happening is best understood not as a move by the PKK away from the EU, but as an ongoing attempt by the organization to be incorporated into the negotiations over Turkey's future, and thus the future of Turkey's Kurds, as well as a concern for its own survival, especially as the centre of gravity in Turkey's Kurdish activism moves from violent to peaceful means, participating in rather than excluded from the country's political system. In other words, the PKK is *not* seeking to actively undermine Turkey's accession to the European Union, but has turned its own political recognition into the condition for its support.

This paper begins with a brief introduction of Turkey's Kurdish question, focusing particularly on how the PKK and its political wing or allies have evolved since the start of its insurgency in 1984 up to the present. Then, special attention is drawn to PKK's installation and activities in Europe since the mid 1980s. This is to serve a better understanding of the effects of the listing for the PKK's operational space in Europe, as well as the current initiatives undertaken in the light of the terrorist designation. After elaborating on the consequences of the terrorist labelling and how it was received by PKK political activists and sympathizers, the paper explores the initiatives aimed at (re)gaining political legitimacy in the international political arena, upon which support for Turkey's accession to the European Union is made conditional. The value of the terrorist designation itself - moral, practical or otherwise - is not the main concern of this paper, it should be emphasized, but rather the impact of the designation on the PKK positioning in relation to the European Union.

1. Background

The Kurdish Question in Turkey and the armed conflict with the PKK

In the inter-war period when the Republic of Turkey arose from the remains of the Ottoman Empire, Mustafa Kemal (Atatürk) led a revolutionary reconstruction of the territory. This involved, among other things, a nationalist project of 'Turkification', and in mainly Kurdish provinces of the south-east of the country, a series of rebellions was

crushed (McDowall 1996, Taspinar 2005, Jongerden 2007). By the 1950s, Kurdish (and other) identities had been technically cleansed by the 'Kemalist' ideology (Kurds were re-designated as 'mountain Turks'). Various forms of martial law and direct rule from Ankara were applied, and further post-war periods of repression followed a succession of military coups (1960, '71, '80). It took until the end of the 1960s for Kurdish dissidents to politically reorganize, and it was only in the mid 80s that Kurds took up arms again, with a fully-fledged insurgency instigated against the Turkish state.

Officially established in 1978, the PKK started its armed insurgency in 1984, which, although interrupted by ceasefires of varying durations, continues to this day. The PKK initially aimed at 'a destruction of colonialism' – referring to all the state-forces 'occupying' the Kurdish populated region of the north-western Middle East (i.e. including territory in Syria, Iraq and Iran, not just Turkey – and 'the construction of a democratic and united Kurdistan, based on Marxist-Leninist principles' (Jongerden & Akkaya 2011). After the 1980 coup, which had led to the imprisonment and exile of almost all leftist and Kurdish nationalist party leaders and militants, the PKK leadership fled Turkey for Syria. This left the party one of the very few radical leftist or Kurdish organizations in or from Turkey that was still operational (Jongerden & Akkaya 2010). The PKK set about implementing a guerrilla war on Maoist principles, through which it was able to effectively takeover large tracts of the countryside in the south-east by the early 1990s. The Turkish military responded, however, and the tide was turned. By the beginning of the millennium the state had largely regained control of the situation, by a variety of legal and illegal methods.⁸⁵ The security situation today remains tense and unresolved, with a small but steady stream of deaths on both sides and unrest in cities.

After the capture of its leader and co-founder, Abdullah Öcalan, in 1999, the PKK transformed itself ideologically and organizationally, upon Öcalan's guidelines passed through lawyers from his prison cell on the island of Imralli (Marcus 2007a, Gunter 2008). The PKK today no longer advocates separation from Turkey as official policy, but seeks the transformation of – and its integration into – a democratized, confederalized Turkey (Akkaya & Jongerden 2011).

The PKK has sought to engage in negotiations for a peace agreement on several occasions, starting from 1993, when it first called upon Turkey to end the fighting by announcing a unilateral ceasefire. Other unilateral ceasefires followed – the longest in the period 1999-2004 – but Turkey has tended to interpret these as a sign of weakness and/or the result of military defeat, and uses the terrorist label to avoid direct, open talks. Unfortunately, tragically even, this is a misreading of the enemy on the part of the state that represents a history of wasted time and lost opportunities. The assumption, especially since Öcalan's capture, that PKK peace moves have been forced by military weakness is erroneous insofar as these have been importantly rooted also, arguably

⁸⁵ Legal methods: e.g. the reorganization of the army for counter insurgency; illegal methods: e.g. extrajudicial killings, the evacuation and destruction of around 3,000 villages and hamlets (see Jongerden 2007).

more so, in the organization's *increased* capacities, its ability, that is, to operate within the political framework of the state (and Europe) in raising mass popular support and developing organizational networks (based in the Kurdish cities inside Turkey and amongst the Diaspora in Europe). The emergence of its press and establishment of pro-Kurdish parties as mentioned, along with, for example, huge demonstrations in support of slain guerrillas have long confirmed to the PKK the strength of other action repertoires besides classical Maoist insurgency.

Coincidentally, it was during the period around the international terrorist listing of the PKK, that the pro-Kurdish Democratic Society Party (*Demokratik Toplum Partisi*, DTP) established itself, with representation at both the national and the local levels. The DTP was generally seen as the political wing of the PKK, although this was unclear (necessarily, given the PKK's terrorist status at home) and thus sometimes queried by outsiders, or just allowed to remain ambivalent.⁸⁶ Compared to its predecessors HEP (1990-1993), DEP (1993-1994) and HADEP (1995-2002), which mainly operated during the heat of the conflict and were thus severely confined, DEHAP (2003-2005) and DTP (2005-2009), working in a less tense political climate, were able to promote more concrete political programs that incorporated the (changing) goals of the PKK (see below).

The Kurdish political parties began to run an increasing number of municipal authorities in the South-East after the 1999 local elections, rising to as many as 54 municipality mayors across eleven provinces, and nine mayors of the provincial capitals by the end of the decade, while the DTP was represented in parliament by 21 MPs following the 2007 national election (elected as 'independent-candidates' in order to circumvent Turkey's 10% electoral threshold). It was through the DTP control of the region, especially of the municipalities, that the PKK was able to maintain and even extend its dominance and popularity there (Marcus 2007b).

The DTP can thus be regarded as putting into practice the new ideological project advocated by Abdullah Öcalan, with many of its political representatives themselves former activists (or 'activists in office'), and pursuing the contentious politics of a (Kurdish/minority/human) rights based agenda (Watts 2006). Many authors have testified to how the lifting of the state of emergency in the South-East in the 2000s opened the way for a more self-conscious Kurdish associational life, and how the DTP run municipalities contributed to the emergence of a new Kurdish public sphere (e.g. Öktem 2008, Gambetti 2008, Marcus 2007a and 2007b, Watts 2006). At the end of 2009, however, following an indictment two years previously, the DTP was finally closed – like other pro-Kurdish parties before – found to have violated Article 68 of the Constitution (i.e. in conflict with the 'independence of the state' and 'indivisible integrity' of its territory and nation). Upon the banning of the DTP, the pro-Kurdish party was promptly

⁸⁶ E.g. '[I]t is an open secret that the party [DTP] is *somehow* related to the PKK (Posch 2007: 39, emphasis added).

replaced by its successor – again, as on previous similar occasions – the pro-Kurdish Peace and Democracy Party (*Bariş ve Demokrasi Partisi*, BDP).

Increased competition over the political representation of Turkey's Kurds

The new Kurdish public sphere has been developing simultaneously with an increased political competition over the representation of Turkey's Kurds between the Kurdish nationalist movement and Turkey's ruling party since 2002, the conservative Muslim Justice and Development Party (*Adalet ve Kalkınma Partisi*, AKP). Constituting the first majority government for a generation and successfully pushing forward the necessary political and economic reforms for the country to become a candidate for full membership of the EU, the AKP has generally found favour in Brussels. The coming to power of the AKP has also significantly affected the Kurdish issue in Turkey, including the PKK (Bahcheli and Sid 2011).

Although continuing a process that had actually been initiated by the previous government, it was the AKP that officially ended the state of emergency. Through this initial engagement with reforms, the AKP government managed to present itself as a party actively seeking to integrate different ethnic and religious minorities in Turkey and devoted to the 'democratization' of the country. This enabled the party during its first years in office to extend its electoral support amongst Turkey's Kurds, as well as gain favour amongst those within the EU institutions in favour of the country's accession.

As a result of the success of the AKP, particularly during its first administration, the DTP, like its predecessors, not only experienced continual political isolation inside Turkey (see Öktem 2008), and repeated demands that it distance itself from the 'terrorists' (PKK) – a call echoed in the EU-Turkey accession negotiations (see below) – but it has also found itself under pressure in its natural constituency. Electorally, the DTP found itself in competition with the AKP, and the PKK began treating what had become its main rival as its number one enemy (even above, that is, the Kemalist state military), with its media and leadership actively involved in efforts to discredit the ruling party (Uslu 2008). This has taken the form of targeting not only AKP intentions regarding the Kurdish issue, but also its politics more generally. Although the DTP was triumphant in the 2009 local elections, the Kurdist party (now BDP) continues to regard the AKP as its biggest threat.

All of which rather begs the question: are the AKP and PKK/DTP/BDP merely involved in a turf war for the political ascendancy, or do they have genuinely different visions for the way ahead? This is relevant not just for a better assessment of the PKK and what has transpired in terms of its approach to Turkey's EU accession over recent years, but also because it might give clues about the likely future of these. A brief review of events last year gives some clues here. In the spring of 2009, the AKP opened a new era of public

debate in Turkey in respect of the Kurdish issue when it announced the launch of a Kurdish initiative (*Kürt açılım*), intended to solve the longstanding problem of the South-East. By the end of the summer, however, it had become clear that the government would neither engage in direct, open political dialogue with the PKK, nor accept the DTP as interlocutor.

Under extreme pressure from the establishment (the judiciary and the military), and the two main opposition parties (Turkish nationalist and Kemalist), as well as large sections of the media, the AKP first broadened and diluted its Kurdish initiative to a democratic one (*demokratik açılım*), which focused instead on other social groups (Alevi, Romani Gypsies) and a normalization in foreign relations (with Turkey's Eastern neighbours). Then it confined its solution to the Kurdish question to cultural and linguistic aspects (e.g. loosening restrictions on Kurdish language use), while shelving the more difficult political issues (e.g. relevant changes to the constitution, what to do with the PKK).

Cotemporaneous efforts by the PKK and DTP that sought to steer the initiative in the direction of negotiations – by means of the submission of Öcalan's Roadmap in the summer of 2009, and the symbolic return of groups of PKK members and families from the mountains and the Mahmur Refugee camp in Iraq – only increased the establishment and opposition parties' critique of the whole initiative as a surrender to the 'terrorists'. Öcalan's attempted involvement was rejected and his roadmap misplaced by the authorities. The crowds and DTP motorcade that greeted the returnees, meanwhile, were perceived as provocative, appearing to the country at large as rather shocking images of PKK victory celebrations. Indeed, it was shortly after this incident that the DTP was banned, paying the price, many would argue, for a major strategic blunder, its own misreading of the other side and wasting of an opportunity (Jenkins 2009, Casier, Hilton and Jongerden 2009).

To a certain extent the restriction of the AKP Kurdish initiative has been due to the small room for manoeuvre the government has. Its continued failure to really follow through with its professed aims, however, has fuelled cynicism about the initiative, as primarily dictated by electioneering politics. Certainly the AKP seems to have assumed the old economic analysis that has Kurdish discontent as originating from poverty and under-development rather than oppression and disenfranchisement. Through the resumption of the old GAP plans, a vast dam project for land irrigation and hydro-electric power, it seeks to tackle the economic grievances that are thought to underlie PKK support in the region and thus deny 'terrorism' its breeding ground. Given the general reluctance of the government to engage in any form of political dialogue and its recent reframing of the initiative as the ultimate struggle against 'terrorism', therefore, Turkey's Kurdish movement has increasingly felt driven into a corner (and all the more so with the closure of the DTP and ongoing raids and arrests of BDP members in the first half of 2010).

To conclude, both Turkey's Kurdish question and its main actor have evolved considerably over the last decades, not only since the beginning of the armed conflict in the mid-1980s but also since the PKK terrorist designation early in the millennium. In addition to its lengthy unilateral ceasefires and change of ideological tack from secession to federalism, the role played by the DTP/BDP in conventional politics has made it even more difficult to pin-down where the presence of the Kurdistan Workers' Party in Kurdish society really begins or ends, complicating its designation as 'terrorist'. At the same time, a competition has developed with the ruling AKP for the claim to represent Turkey's Kurdish population in the region, played out in the media and at the ballot box. This has given rise to a deepening animosity between the Kurdish nationalist movement and the current Turkish government, and forms the background against which the narrative of this paper should be understood. The PKK and its supporters have perceived themselves to be doubly confined, first by the international terrorist designation and second by the political challenges they face inside the region, and it is this particular combination of confinements that has informed the recent approach of the PKK to Turkey's EU application. Furthermore, it might be added, the current situation (i.e. in respect of the lack of progress or hope even of such from the AKP's Kurdish/democratic initiative) indicates that the present dynamic will be a continuing one.

The PKK presence in Europe

The PKK 'struggle' did not remain confined to the Kurdish region of Turkey and its neighbours, but was continued on European soil, where the PKK established itself very early on in its history. Among the growing European Kurdish Diaspora, there developed a transnational Kurdish community which included the cross-border political organization of Kurds from Turkey (Grojean 2008, Watts 2004, Adamson 2002, Østergaard-Nielsen, 2001, Van Bruinessen 1998).

The pro-PKK associations, set up since the mid 1980s proved helpful in obtaining public and political support among European Kurds, within a section of European public opinion and from a number of European politicians. Solidarity networks were built-up with small, extreme leftist organizations that were ideologically close to the PKK. Contacts were developed between leftist and Kurdish nationalist politicians holding seats in regional and national parliaments in different European countries as well as in the European Parliament (Casier 2011). This provided the PKK and its sympathizers with concrete means to advocate their cause and to publicize the plight of Kurds living in Turkey, particularly during the height of the armed conflict. PKK militants could collect financial contributions from European Kurds, call for hunger strikes and demonstrations, set up a satellite television station, radio stations and newspapers (Grojean 2008, Watts 2004, Eccarius-Kelly 2002) and develop their own network of

'diplomats', all of which gave leverage to an increased visibility of their promotion of the Kurdish cause.

The tolerance of PKK activities and criticisms coming from European politicians enraged the Turkish authorities, whose embassies and diplomats were continually engaged in attempts to discredit the Kurdish organization (e.g. as funded by the narcotics trade and extortion from the European Kurdish populations). Turkey pressured the western European governments to crack down on PKK activities on their soil, threatening them in turn with withdrawal from economically important contracts and lucrative arm deals (Grojean 2008). This pressure gradually began to take effect, with increased governmental surveillance of PKK activities in a number of European countries. Although this was largely ineffective, it did pave the way for Europe's acceding to Turkey's request to list the PKK as an international terrorist organization.

2. The listing of the PKK as an international terrorist organization

The first country in Europe to list the PKK as a terrorist organization was the UK. With a thirty-year history of 'terrorism' in Ulster / Northern Ireland, the UK responded quickly to the changed environment following the 9/11 attacks in the US, and, as of 28th March 2001, the PKK found itself officially listed as a terrorist organization alongside eighteen other foreign organizations active in the United Kingdom (UK 2001). The EU started listing organizations and individual as terrorists from December 2001 onwards, when it largely copied the regulation worked out in the US Patriot Act drawn up during the year 2000 motivated by the 9/11 attacks and principally with Al-Qaeda / the Taliban in mind. The first EU list of 29 individuals and thirteen groups and entities included national insurgent movements (ETA, Real IRA, etc), but omitted the PKK (EC 2001). This was soon amended, however, and in the spring of 2002 the PKK was proscribed in Europe, included among the expanded listing of 23 groups and formally named as 'involved in terrorist acts' by the Council of the European Union (EC 2002 :1).⁸⁷ The original EU decision to place the PKK on the terrorist list has been confirmed since by the six-monthly review of the list, to which the post-2004 casualties and bomb attacks attributed to the PKK or claimed by TAK (*Teyrêbazên Azadiya Kurdistan*, Kurdistan Freedom Falcons), an affiliated splinter-group, undoubtedly played a significant role

Officially, the international terrorist lists were aimed at targeting the funding of terrorism, through travel restrictions and the freezing of assets. Their real aim, however, was political, as acknowledged by the EU Anti-Terror Coordinator, Gilles Van de Kerckhove: 'The reasons are political. You say that it is a criminal organization, not a

⁸⁷ In May 2004, the ban was revised to 'Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK), (a.k.a. KADEK; a.k.a. KONGRA-GEL)' (EC, 2004), in recognition of the internal restructuring of the party (see Akkaya & Jongerden, 2010). For ease of reference, this paper will only use the name 'PKK', which should be understood as standing for KADEK and sister organizations as appropriate.

political organization. That is the message' (Van de Kerckhove, 20th October 2009⁸⁸). Interestingly, the message was not necessarily intended to be entirely one-sided, at least not in the case of national insurgencies. In fact, executives like Van de Kerckhove go so far as to regard the lists as 'assets', to employ against the state as well as insurgents. In particular, on Turkey, he argued that 'The list can be a means to leverage, to pressure Turkey to respect its minorities and human rights,' implying that international recognition of Turkey's 'terrorism problem' would facilitate the engagement of the Turkish authorities with the EU's political concerns.

However, the extent to which the lists are necessary, really can be and actually are being used as leverage to pressure the different parties in the conflict is debatable. In Turkey's case, first, its desire to join the EU is already leverage in itself, with vastly more traction than anything the terrorist listing can provide; second, the existence of the lists certainly appears to have an opposite effect, i.e. to support those state actors that do *not* want to enter into negotiations for peace, but to proceed with a conventional counter insurgency approach against non-state combatants; and third, the listing has also undermined certain human rights in respect of the organizations listed, such as the freedom of expression and association.

On this point the EU action can be considered problematic. Turkey's problem with human rights has been one of the principle obstacles in its entry passage to Europe, and the Kurdish issue in the South-East the major part of this. And yet the EU seems not only to fall short of its own standards (the standard critique of Western anti-terror legislation taking on a sharp irony here), but also to have been guilty of a major disconnect in failing to appreciate that its terrorist designation would exacerbate the very human rights abuses it condemns. Thus, recent EU reports note concern about Ankara's 2006 amendments to its Anti-Terror law (EP, 2008), leading to the entirely predictable conclusion of 'undue restrictions on fundamental human rights' (EC 2009: 30).⁸⁹ In the eyes of the PKK, the EU is culpable in this for its branding of the organization (see below), which the same reports only confirm when, for example, the European Parliament 'reiterates its solidarity with Turkey in its fight against terrorism and once again calls on the PKK to declare and respect an immediate and unconditional ceasefire' (EP 2008: 9).

Obviously there is a need for the EU to confirm to Turkey that it can be a trusted partner that shows genuine concern for Turkey's internal and regional stability – Turkish sensitivities cannot just be ignored. This means that simple de-proscription is not a

⁸⁸ From a speech given at the conference 'Terrorism lists, executive powers and human rights' at the *Université Libre de Bruxelles*.

⁸⁹ The European Commission staff report notes that the amendments have provided for children aged 15-18 to be tried as adults on charges of 'belonging to a terrorist organization', resulted in the 'suspension of several periodicals' and been used to 'punish non-violent opinions', causing hundreds of politicians and the members of two trade unions to be arrested, with one politician sentenced to eighteen months in prison for his speeches (EC 2009: 21, 25, 30).

realistic option. Most probably it needs to be linked to progress towards a negotiated resolution of the conflict, which would seem to mitigate for a deep involvement on the part of the EU in Turkey's 'peace process'.

Unfortunately, such a proactive approach by the EU has not been forthcoming. Instead, therefore, a one-sided policy has led the PKK's designation as a terrorist organization to become deeply ingrained in the accession negotiations. As a result, the main problems concerning the lack of willingness to reform on the Turkish side are linked to the ongoing and recently increased uncertainty about Turkey's entry into the European Union. The lack of anything like a complete commitment to Turkey by the EU means, therefore, that the effect of the designation remains questionable in this regard. It may well be that the PKK terrorist designation works against conflict resolution and thus exacerbates the human rights situation in the South-East which therefore continues to drag on Turkey's accession process leaving Turkey to 'sort out its own mess' before accession can even be countenanced – a prospect which, frankly, would not unduly worry many in Europe and, unfortunately, does appear to be the most likely scenario for the short to medium term future.

While practical anti-terrorism measures have affected the PKK and its militants and sympathizers to some extent, curtailing some activities, the de-legitimizing effect is crucial. The labelling has had profound effects on the political and societal space for the Kurdish movement both in Turkey and in Europe – so much so that the majority of PKK initiatives undertaken at the diplomatic level have been to address the labelling and its consequences, rather than straightforwardly articulating grievances and demands and advocating for Kurds in Turkey.

3. Faced with the terrorist designation

Taking an agency-oriented perspective, which incorporates the ways in which actors present their problems and develop coalitions (Smith & Bakker 2005), the following sections engage with how the listing has been received inside the circles of PKK militants and sympathizers. Having the actors 'speak for themselves' is not meant to provide a platform to proclaim and/or promote their aims and means, but allows a better understanding of these actors and their collective psychology that steers strategic choices being made. The response to the listing and an assessment of its effects are contextualized here in the relationship between the PKK and the EU institutions.

'European states are being taken hostage by Turkish Policies' – proscription as betrayal

The proscription of the PKK as a terrorist organization and the condemnations of terrorism in EU official communications have been perceived as a betrayal by the

leading figures in the PKK and their followers. Engaging in an inquiry of this shared sense of betrayal is important in order to understand the anti-EU rhetoric of a number of leading figures within the PKK that has followed the terrorist listing (as described by Uslu, 2008), and, at the same time, the continuation of the PKK's engagement with the European Union.

The feeling of betrayal relates strongly to both the timing of the first proscription and a 'politics of suffering'. Regarding the timing, the PKK was defined as a terrorist organization not only during a long period of (unilateral) cease-fire but also following Öcalan's scaling back of conditions for a solution to the Kurdish issue, as he openly argued that the problem in Turkey's south-east would be resolved by meeting cultural demands of the Kurds, thereby shifting the goal of political autonomy to the background. The ceasefire and scaled back demands were understood inside the movement and by its followers as a genuine display of the PKK desire to resolve the Kurdish issue by non-violent means. Being labelled as a terrorist organization, therefore, was experienced as a refusal to engage with the PKK – and by extension the Kurds – and clearing the way for a state-led approach to the issue. Considering the high-levels of Kurdish distrust of the Turkish state, it should have come as no surprise that conspiracy theories were soon circulating in the Kurdish media, or that a sense of betrayal by 'the West' or 'Europe' would become widespread among activists and supporters in Turkey and Europe. One human rights activist expressed his feelings thus:

"Europe is following Turkey's line in calling our struggle 'terrorism'. We are unhappy about the results of the European delegations that have come here. We show them everything, we take them to the destroyed villages, we talk to the families and so people relive their sufferings again, but there is no change to be seen at all. On the contrary, the movement is being called terrorist" (Personal communication, Diyarbakir, 14 September 2007).

The PKK sense of betrayal also needs to be understood in the light of suffering and sacrifices made by these Kurds and their communities in the armed conflict between the PKK and the state. In many of the interviews conducted by the author, Kurdish political activists have expressed their frustrations about the terrorist listing in these terms. Activists also relate more generally to 'a politics of suffering' that is actively maintained – through the commemoration of martyrs and significant traumatizing events – as a means both to keep in remembrance the unsettled accounts with the Turkish state and to continue to unite people under the PKK umbrella.⁹⁰

⁹⁰The demonization of terrorism and the glorification of freedom fighting both, of course, ignore the (extra)ordinary costs of human suffering that activists and their families pay, extending to that of their lives; equally, however, the suffering of non-activist Kurds is 'claimed' by the PKK, even though those people themselves may be ambivalent about or even resent the PKK. These points are made just to give a sense some of the issues involved in the PKK sense of suffering – many more could be listed (and for both sides, of course).

Concerns over the designation have been raised continuously in public political meetings in Europe. The following example, from an international conference on the EU and the Kurds, develops further the equation of PKK with (Turkish) Kurds, essentially a discourse of (assumed or claimed) representation:

“There are 20 million citizens of Kurdish origin [in Turkey] but still they present it as if it is a problem of terrorism. But the people have legitimate rights and they are not defending separatism. They seek peaceful coexistence. Autonomous regions are necessary in order to freely live our identities. If you do not live up to any of these legitimate demands then it looks as if the Kurds are the cause of the problem. Is the EU aware of who is really responsible for the failure to find a solution: the Kurds or the state? To picture the Kurds as terrorists is unfair and ignoble. This has been a 25-year process that caused great suffering for Kurds and Turks [...]”(Ahmet Gulabi Dere, diplomat for the KNK Brussels, 28 January, 2009⁹¹).

Such words testify to the shared sense among PKK activists and sympathizers that the organization’s terrorist designation has turned Kurds into the guilty party, from the victims of violence into its perpetrators, while ‘the state’ appears to escape blame. There is thus a collective feeling of being let down and misunderstood, confirming – in their eyes – the popular saying that ‘Kurds have no friends but the mountains.’ This partly explains the PKK’s unwillingness to refrain from maintaining its armed guerrilla forces, and its employment of a sporadic ‘dialogue through arms’.

“Those who go against the state system are being considered terrorists. But the solution lies in dialogue, the democratic method. [...] They say that PKK is terrorist. No, PKK is the consequence and if the cause does not change, than the consequence will not change. PKK can lay down its weapons, but in the past this was always left unanswered.” (Abdullah Demirbaş, then DTP Mayor, 2nd October 2008).⁹²

‘This is the wall that we are facing’ – diplomatic constraints

The European Parliament and the European Commission have both voiced their support for Turkey’s struggle against terrorism in making calls for a peaceful solution. For example, the 2009 Progress Report by the European Commission described the situation thus:

“During the reporting period Turkey faced continuous terrorist violence resulting in loss of life, despite a relative reduction of violence from the end of 2008. In December 2008 the European Union reaffirmed its support to Turkey in the fight against terrorism, which must be conducted with due regard for human rights, fundamental freedoms and international law” (EC 2009: 30).

⁹¹ From a speech given at the 5th EUTCC International conference on Turkey, EU and the Kurds, in the European Parliament, Brussels.

⁹² From a speech given at the conference on the EU-Turkey accession process, held by the Kurdish Institute of Brussels at the House of Parliamentarians, Brussels, 2nd October 2008.

The political wing of the Kurdish movement, the DTP/BDP, has continuously voiced criticism of the EU's terror designation as a way of dealing with the conflict, as obstructing any kind of official negotiation of national actors with the PKK. Regardless of the validity of this analysis – the PKK is officially ostracised from involvement in any internal process anyway by the Turkish state terrorist designation – the links that the DTP/BDP have had to the PKK have certainly caused them also to be directly affected by the designation. The sense that Europe was culpable in the DTP closure is hard to deny when the EU clearly implied that it was not working constructively in the political sphere:

“[The EP] ... Calls on the DTP, its members of parliament and mayors to distance themselves clearly from the Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK) and to engage constructively in the quest for a political solution to the Kurdish issue within the democratic Turkish state” (EP 2008).

Turkey's Kurdish question has long figured on the EU agenda (Tocci, 2005), and members of both the European Parliament and the Council of Europe continue to engage with Kurdish political activists who obviously have strong affiliations with the PKK. There is thus a clear implicit recognition of and support for at least some of the demands of the Kurdish movement. Nevertheless, while the cause might be seen as just and legitimate, most European politicians do not want to (be seen to) legitimize the PKK's leading role in formulating and presenting it (Casier 2011). As a result, there is no public acknowledgement of the PKK as one of the main representatives of Kurds from Turkey, which confirms the international public image of the PKK as nothing more than an armed terrorist organization and prevents recognition of it as, at the same time, a social and political movement enjoying considerable popular support (Eccarius-Kelly 2002, Romano 2006, Akkaya & Jongerden 2011). In the words of one activist-journalist:

“The PKK is called a terrorist organization and the DTP cannot criticize that? But how can you explain that hundreds of thousands Kurds take the streets in Turkey and Europe with the same demands? Are they all terrorists? That is a scandal!”⁹³

There is an awareness amongst PKK militants that public recognition of their popular support would counteract the one-sided attention drawn by the Turkish state and now Europe and the USA to the ‘terrorist’ (and common criminal) activities of the PKK (Casier 2011). And insofar as the DTP/BDP is seen as the political wing of the PKK, then its increasingly strong showing at local and national elections confirms this to the tune of several millions of votes.⁹⁴ Unfortunately, however, the War on Terror has complicated the already problematized understanding of armed conflicts and how these can be solved (Sheper-Hughes & Bourgeois 2008). The upshot of all this in Europe has been to devote attention to pressing the government of Turkey on the matter of the cultural rights of Kurds, and paying less heed to the political demands of the Kurdish

⁹³ From an intervention from the floor during the conference on the EU-Turkey accession process (ibid.).

⁹⁴ During the 2009 local elections the DTP almost doubled its number of municipality mayors, and attained the highest local assembly winning margins in the country.

movement and the need to create a positive climate for peace negotiations. This has led to increasing scepticism within PKK circles of the role the EU is willing to play in the resolution of Turkey's Kurdish question by means of the accession process. As one leading PKK member puts it:

"As Kurds we have supported this process. We have worked hard in order to convince the people to give a date for the start of the accession negotiations. But when I look back now at what has happened, since the negotiations started, when we look at the Kurds present here today, than this is not an improvement. I wonder if we made the right choice to support this process? (...) Things are not progressing. With the support of the EU, Turkey is increasing the repression of the Kurdish people. Since the accession negotiations started, Kurds in Europe too have come to be looked upon as terrorists, with the support of certain European countries, such as Germany and France. [...] If Turkey is willing to respect the criteria [of Copenhagen] then we will be in favour of accession, if it does not, than we will not be supportive." (Ahmet Gulabi Dere, diplomat for the Kurdish National Congress in Brussels, 2008).⁹⁵

In the latest EUTCC Conference on Turkey and the Kurds in the European Parliament (February 3rd, 2010), DTP/BDP Member of the Turkish General Assembly Sebahat Tünel argued:

"The discourse on terrorism has been enormously damaging and it is the reason why the fact that DTP parliament members are sentenced to jail is not being discussed. [...] The task for our European friends is to create opportunities for dialogue, and that is why it is necessary to put the concept of terror to discussion because now this is the wall that we are facing."

A number of Kurdish activists, leading militants of the PKK in Europe especially, have come to see the EU as merely working in Turkey's interests and against that of the Kurds. Adem Uzun, KNK Foreign Affairs member, reviewed the EU reports referred to thus:

"[I]n the post 9/11 period, taking courage from "the war against terror" and the "you are either with us, or against us" doctrine, Turkey escalated the war yet again. [...] What we essentially would like to point out is that the EU's approach is prejudiced, more so, it regards the matter within the framework of the demands of the Turkish state. [...] As a result, the EU reports justify state violence. [...] The EU reports tend to impose [conditions] upon Kurds, even ignoring their democratic rights by telling Kurds what kind of leaders they should choose for themselves" (Uzun, at the EUTCC conference, February 2010).

The charge against the EU of prejudice obviously needs shading – the EU is not a monolithic body with one single opinion. Support for the Kurdish cause in the Parliament comes mostly from the leftist parties, with centrist liberals also advocating

⁹⁵ From a speech given at the conference on the EU-Turkey accession process, held by the Kurdish Institute of Brussels at the House of Parliamentarians, Brussels, 2nd October 2008.

for human rights (Casier 2011), but the parliament as a whole moved to the right at the last (2009) election, while the seat of EU power remains the Council, which always tends to be more conservative than the Parliament. The lack of action or outcry from Europe when the DTP was closed down testifies to the diminished support for the Kurdish party from within the EU institutions. This regardless the ousted criticisms by the Council of Europe, the Commission as well as the European Parliament on party closures in Turkey. Nevertheless, voices supportive of the Kurdish cause are to be heard. In respect to the pre-closure pressure on the DTP, for example, Olli Rehn (former EU Commissioner for Enlargement, responsible for overseeing Turkey's candidacy), backgrounded the terrorism issue in coming out clearly in support of the party:

"We have consistently stressed that the fight against terrorism must be conducted with due regard for human rights and fundamental freedoms, in particular as regards freedom of expression and freedom of association. Political pluralism is an integral part of any democracy. The Turkish parliament is today largely representative of the country's political diversity. *DTP has been contributing to pluralism in Turkey, with its political legitimacy confirmed by the results of the March municipal elections.* At the same time, the people of the Southeast of Turkey need peace, stability and prosperity rather than further violence and confrontation. [...] In this context, we have reiterated to Turkey that the Turkish legal provisions governing the closure of political parties are not in line with the European Convention of Human Rights and with European practices" (Rehn, 2009, emphasis added).

In direct contacts with EU politicians, however, it is the case that DTP/BDP representatives have been continuously asked to dissociate themselves from the PKK or to clarify their relationship. In a discussion with the then leader of the DTP group in the Turkish General Assembly (and current co-chair of the BDP), the DTP/BDP position on this was outlined in no uncertain terms:

"We are not going to consider the PKK a terrorist organization. We have to explain this in Europe too. Terrorist organizations in Afghanistan and Iraq are terrorist organizations. What is a terrorist organization and how should we combat it, is an important question. But the PKK does not belong in the list, because it has different roots, different reasons of existence and its fight is a different fight" (Selahattin Demirtaş, personal communication, Diyarbakir, 22 September 2007).

The closure of the DTP has, in this regard, played out in favour of the PKK's holding on to its arms. In fact, the terrorist listing can be said to have polarized politics in the south-east of Turkey. Kerckhove's 'asset' for 'leverage' (above) has had the effect of hardening support for the 'terrorists'. Shortly after the DTP closure, for example, its leader went on record for the first time to state the role of Öcalan in his party's politics.⁹⁶ This is also acknowledged by Kurdish politicians who are not associated with the PKK or DTP/BDP, such as Haşim Haşimi, former Welfare Party MP and former Mayor of Cizre:

⁹⁶ It was through Öcalan, declared Ahmet Türk (ex-DTP leader), that DTP MPs reversed their decision to resign their seats (reported at: <http://www.hurriyet.com.tr/gundem/13242730.asp>).

“Whoever says that the PKK is a terrorist organization will not gain any votes anymore. You cannot ignore the reality. The shadow of Öcalan is there and to call him a terrorist will not solve the problems” (Personal communication, Diyarbakir, 20 September 2007).

Being labelled ‘terrorists’, therefore, has increased the symbolic political and societal isolation of the PKK and affiliated organizations in Turkey and in Europe, increased the felt sense of injustice experienced by activists, and played a part in the muzzling of their views as expressed in conventional arena of party politics. On the international political stage, the voices of Kurdish activists and diplomats remain marginal, and the floor is being given over to the ruling AKP and its initiative addressing the Kurdish issue, which receives warm support. AKP measures have been confined mostly to soft options that could count upon the approval of most European politicians. The Kurdish issue has become somewhat de-politicized in the eyes of the European outsiders, as well as a majority of the Turkish public.

In contrast to this de-politicization, Kurdish political activists and their supporters have become increasingly political in recent years. The continuous isolation of the Kurdish movement appears to have led to a sharpened Kurdish nationalist discourse, with rising Kurdish demands (as compared to the years immediately following Öcalan’s arrest) and an increase in Euro-scepticism amongst Kurdish activists and diplomats. Actions undertaken by PKK-related groups in Europe meanwhile, their efforts to have the Kurds rally around the PKK leadership, evidence a resolute unwillingness to be sidelined.

‘We have to find a way to explain that this is not a good approach to the reality of the Kurds’ – in search of political restoration.

Faced with the ‘terrorist’ label, the PKK and affiliated organizations and parties have developed a number of coping strategies in order to regain their political legitimacy and seek political restoration. Legal and political initiatives have been taken and social-political protest events launched. The many quotations in this paper, stemming from the interviews and observations conducted by the author, also bear testimony in themselves to the efforts of Kurdish political activists to seek political recognition.

The PKK debated the justice of the terrorist designation before the European court in Luxemburg (as mentioned), through its representatives in the Kurdistan National Congress (KNK) and Abdullah Öcalan’s brother Osman. Arguments objecting to the listing on substantive grounds became untenable with the end of the unilateral ceasefire in 2004 and bomb blasts in western Turkish cities in 2005 and 2006, according to one of the lawyers on the case (personal communication, London, 27 July 2009), so the case was won only on procedural grounds of due process. However, the verdict did not affect the later listings and the PKK by the EU.

A range of other legal efforts have been undertaken with the intention of restoring the legitimacy of the PKK. A conference was held at prestigious British Chattam House over

the question whether or not the PKK could be considered a non-state armed group and, consequently, fall within the confines of International War and Humanitarian Law. The same question was also addressed at the 2007 EUTCC conference, where many of the debates that year pointed in particular to the need to incorporate the PKK into negotiations over the future of Turkey's Kurdish question and its resolution. More generally, a large part of the lobbying work of the European Parliament by Kurdish organizations and other groups and individuals has been directed at the creation of a political space which is inclusive of the PKK, and thus devoted to the survival and strengthening of the position of the party and its leader (Casier 2011). This goal was also actively pursued by the DTP in their diplomatic activities:

"We want to exchange views with the EU. We want to make clear to them what the problem is and make clear what we demand. Many institutions that are responsible for the activities in Europe are being closed down. We want them to be able to do their job again. But the main issue is to remember what the problem is and what the solutions can be, for example through conferences. Due to calling the PKK terrorist, all institutions are now being called terrorist. We have to find a way to explain that this is not a good approach to the reality of the Kurds" (Selahattin Demirtaş, personal communication Diyarbakir, 22 September 2007).

To this end, a comprehensive effort has been undertaken by the International Initiative 'Freedom for Abdullah Öcalan – Peace in Kurdistan'. This association has aimed at the international restoration of Öcalan's position as the political leader of the Kurds, since his capture and imprisonment in 1999. Former lawyers of Öcalan have been involved in its activities, which include the pursuit of various strategies aimed at bringing Öcalan to the foreground in the international community. Öcalan's defence texts (presented at the Court of Athens and at the European Court of Human Rights) were published in book form and his ideological changes and demands presented in several brochures and leaflets in different European languages. The Initiative has also undertaken continuous actions to call for a condemnation of Öcalan's prison conditions on Imralli island, rallied for support for Öcalan in the Council of Europe and obtained a number of members to sign a motion for resolution on 'The state of health of Mr. Abdullah Öcalan.'

In 2006 the Freedom Initiative co-organized another major campaign launched by KON-KURD, the umbrella federation of all Kurdish federations in Europe. The campaign called upon the Kurds to sign a petition in which they would declare: '*I, from Kurdistan, recognize Mr. Abdullah ÖCALAN as a political representative in Kurdistan.*'⁹⁷ Some three and a quarter million people 'from Kurdistan' have signed the petition to date. The petition was handed over to the European Parliament and the Council of Europe to send a clear message that Öcalan – given his popular support – should be incorporated in the negotiations over a resolution of the Kurdish issue. In 2009, the International Initiative

⁹⁷ URL: <http://www.freedom-for-ocalan.com/english/aktuell/campaign/konkurd-form.pdf>.

was actively involved in sustaining Öcalan's initiative to push forward a roadmap to peace.

In Britain, meanwhile, an international initiative of political organizations from different countries that found themselves on the UK terrorist list was established, in which the PKK is involved. CAMPACC has been operating in coordination with the Peace in Kurdistan campaign and the Kurdish National Congress (KNK) London and also started a petition addressed to the British government calling for the delisting of the PKK in Great Britain and aiming at the collection of 10 000 signatures.

This brief sketch of initiatives gives an impression of some of the approaches being taken in support of the PKK in Europe. The International Initiative was successful in pressuring the CPT to conduct fact-finding missions and bring members of the Council of Europe to adopt a resolution on Abdullah Öcalan, ultimately leading to a reconsideration in Turkey of his prison conditions. Other initiatives, such as the petition that gathered over three million signatures did not seem to have a very clear direct impact. Taken as a whole, however, these initiatives do testify to the ongoing popularity of the PKK and its leader, indicative of the problematic nature of its designation as mere terrorists.

4. The PKK impact on and the Turkey-EU accession process

The PKK seeks both national and international recognition as the main representative of Turkey's Kurds. This quest is undoubtedly problematic in that it foregoes political and societal realities inside the country, where Kurds greatly differ in the extent to which they identify with their ethnicity, and how they relate their personal daily concerns to the political aspirations and promises of different political parties. Given that it swept the elections in the South-East during its early years in office, one could argue – and it has indeed been argued by Prime Minister Erdoğan himself – that the ruling AKP is the primary representative of the Kurds (Bahcheli & Noel 2011). However, even a majority in numbers is merely that: it does not undo the significant impact that the PKK as a social-political movement has in the region. This impact translates into votes for the DTP/BDP, and the Kurdish constituents certainly do consider a vote for the pro-Kurdish parties to be 'voting PKK' (Marcus 2007b).

Over the last two decades an alternative socio-political reality has come into being in the Kurdish dominated region of Turkey. It is unlikely that any 'Kurdish initiative' that neglects this reality or, for that matter, seeks to 'win back to society' the populace there will succeed in the short run. It is to be expected that huge numbers of politicized Kurdish citizens will continue to appoint the DTP/BDP and thus indirectly the PKK to speak on their behalf. A continued neglect of this reality, and/or active policies to hamper these political (and societal) actors through judicial short-winging and counter-terrorism, promises ongoing disengagement of this part of the Kurdish constituency from the Turkish state and society and increases Kurdish nationalist demands (see also

Casier, Jongerden & Walker forthcoming). The apparent deepening of mass support for the DTP/BDP against the AKP and the hardening of the Kurdish position appear as evidence for this.

Obviously the ongoing refusal to enter into negotiations with the 'terrorists' (and ultimately a process of political integration) provides little incentives for the PKK to entirely abandon armed struggle as a resource. Therefore the armed campaign continues, even though it has become a low-intensity conflict in the post 1999 era. Indeed, Kurdish activist perceptions of the Kurdish opening as culminating in the closure of the DTP have already led, it would seem, to the suspension of the PKK ceasefire in the summer of 2010 and a 'a new era' of violence. What form this new era may take is unclear, but there certainly seems to be a 'higher risk' in particular of PKK attacks on 'high profile, relatively soft, targets in the cities of western Turkey' (Jenkins 2010) – or, terrorism, by any standards.

The continued violence brings along new grievances on both sides, constantly reviving both Turkish and Kurdish nationalist feelings that then translate into further societal friction, including civil unrest and the outward discrimination of Kurdish citizens in Turkish cities (Yeğen 2011, Kentel 2011). A destabilizing factor in Turkish politics, the continuation of the armed conflict thus raises serious internal (as well as cross-border) security issues. This is all the more so as the continuation of the conflict, and the anti-terror policies that accompany it, allow for undue restrictions in the spheres of the freedom of speech, freedom of press, freedom of organization and the freedom of political parties, and thus slows down the needed legal and judicial reforms in Turkey.

It is exactly these consequences that affect the Turkey-EU accession process, wherein Turkey's human rights records and the process of democratization, demanding both political demilitarization and a depoliticization of the Turkish judiciary, have been continuous matters of concern for the member-states, the European Commission, the Council of Europe and the European Parliament (see Tocci 2005). Indeed, the continued raising of these concerns is also what led (in the first half of the 2000s) to a number of accommodations of the Kurdish demands in Turkey that could never have been realized were it not for the bargaining space the EU provided the successive the Turkish governments. However, the ongoing atmosphere of 'being under threat' places serious obstacles in front of any government that wants to go ahead with the necessary reforms in the crucial domains of the judiciary and the military. A politically negotiated solution of the Kurdish issue, including the armed conflict is therefore intimately linked with the success or failure of the Turkey-EU accession process.

Conclusion

The designation of the PKK as an international terrorist organization has seriously affected the Kurdish nationalist movement and its supporters' trust in the international

institutions, particularly the EU. This has brought some scholars, notably Uslu (2008), to the reasonable conclusion that the PKK has turned against Turkey's accession to the European Union. Nevertheless, the evidence presented in this paper suggests a different interpretation of the PKK position, that the criticisms and the diminishing support for accession amongst the Kurdish constituents be understood first, in the context of the position in Turkey – with the competition from the AKP – and second, in the context of the PKK proscription as a terrorist organization and the associated pressure brought to bear on the politically successful DTP. With this in mind the strong anti-EU rhetoric of the PKK can be seen as one part of its ongoing struggle to (re)gain political legitimacy and create a political space that is inclusive of the movement that represents Turkey's most politicized Kurds.

The coming months and years will therefore be decisive for the PKK as it chooses whether or not to continue to support or opt out of the Turkey-EU accession negotiations. The thrust of this paper is to suggest that this is certainly not yet decided; the PKK has not renounced its support of Turkey's accession to the European Union, but rather has come to make its support conditional upon its own recognition as a political actor in the negotiations in particular, and Turkey's politics more generally. If the EU continues to list the PKK as a terrorist group and pressure the pro-Kurdish party in Turkey (now BDP) on its PKK relationship, then those (historically dominant) forces in Turkey that prefer to neglect Kurdish political representation will be further strengthened. Politically ignored and no longer militarily able to fight a guerrilla war, the PKK may indeed feel pushed towards full blown terrorism. The terrorist listing may become a self fulfilling category for another generation to deal with.

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6. *Another Middle East is possible!* Turkey's Kurdish nationalist movement and its engagement with the Global Justice Movement: internationalizing the cause or re-affirming local achievements?⁹⁸

Introduction

Activists of the Kurdish movement have taken an active part in the Global Justice Movement since the beginning of the 2000s. The Global Justice Movement (GJM or 'anti-globalization movement') is thought to have seen the light of day with the revolt of the Zapatistas (EZLN) in Chiapas in 1994. It is currently defined as "*the loose network of organizations (with varying degrees of formality and even including political parties) and other actors engaged in collective action of various kinds, on the basis of the shared goal of advancing the cause of justice (economic, social, political, and environmental) among and between peoples across the globe*" (Della Porta 2007: 6). Constitutive parts of the GJM assemble in social forums defined by its organizers as 'open meeting places'. The first World Social Forum (WSF) was organized in Porto Alegre, Brazil in 2001 – as a counter to the World Economic Forum in Davos – with Kurdish mayors from Turkey among the participants (Wallerstein 2004).

Following the WSF, European and local social forums have been organized in different places around the world, and there has been a process of intensification with the development of networks and campaigns spreading eastwards across the European continent, and into Turkey. Particularly the European Social Forum in Athens attracted numerous delegations from Eastern Europe and the Mediterranean Area (Della Porta 2007: 3-4). From Turkey, over a 1000 people would participate, with numerous thematic session and workshops being organized by Turkish and Kurdish groups (Erdi Lelandais 2008). The experiences with the Global Justice movement culminated in the establishment of the Kurdish movement's own local organization, the Mesopotamia Social Forum, in the city of Diyarbakır. And it is here that this paper begins. Engaging with the Mesopotamia Social Forum (MSF), I want to question if the Kurdish movements' engagement is serving the internationalization of its cause, as may appear to be the case, or whether, in fact, the social forum is actually better understood primarily as a means to re-affirm the counter-society it has been developing and,

⁹⁸ A shortened version of this paper was presented in the panel 'Leftists after all? The Kurdish Movement in Turkey and the Left, from the 1960s to the 2000s', under the title 'Another Middle East is Possible!': Turkey's Kurdish Movement's Capitalization of the Social Forum – Instrument for Internal Change or Internationalization of the Cause?', at the 44th Annual Meeting of the Middle East Studies Association of North America, San Diego, 18-21 November 2010. The paper itself will be submitted for peer-review as part of a special issue on the relationship between the Kurdish Movement and the (international) Left in Turkey, for the *European Journal of Turkish Studies*.

moreover, present itself as a leader in this, as at the forefront of a movement for an alternative Middle East, an imaginary other world. From this, latter, perspective, the Kurdish movement should be regarded as working through the Social Forums in seeking to relate itself to national and international leftist activism. I will start with a description of the evening of the official opening of the MSF, and develop my argument from there.

Together with my Kurdish friend Nazan, I explored the site of the Mesopotamia Social Forum in Diyarbakır's Sümer Park on the night before its opening. It was the evening of 25 September 2009, and it was here that the Kurdish movement would hold the first local Social Forum in the region over the following weekend, hosting local, regional, national and international activists and politicians. An old industrial site had been converted into the municipality's social service offices, cultural exposition rooms and annex bookshop, symbolically named after Diyarbakır's late Kurdish writer, Mehmet Uzun.⁹⁹ The main buildings where the workshops and panels would be held was flanked by a tent where young activists from Western Europe were assembling in the Amed International Youth Camp.¹⁰⁰ The image of the tent and the newly opened buildings of the (Kurdist party, DTP¹⁰¹ run) local BDP government next to which it was erected brought to mind the civic and political reorientation of a movement still reconfiguring itself from an insurgent organization into a civic (socio-political) movement. In front of the tent, banners were hung calling for international solidarity and socialism, while on its flanks were pinned pictures of the Mexican Zapatista movement and high up in the surrounding trees flew a flag showing a picture of imprisoned PKK leader Abdullah Öcalan, taken several years before, when he was still living under Syrian protection in Damascus. A range of brochures, leaflets and magazines of the Kurdish movement were displayed and scarves and flags in the Kurdish colors of yellow, red and green on sale. The green PKK flag with its central yellow star fluttered on top of a little Bedouin tent on the side. It was surprising to find the emblems of the Kurdish movement so openly displayed in a public park, in the middle of the city. And although a symbolically loaded activist scene was set up right in front of us, there were no security forces or police officers anywhere to be seen. There was nothing that reminded of the environment of insecurity that had prevailed in Diyarbakır in the 1980s and 1990s, when the state of emergency was still in place that allowed fierce repression by the Turkish security forces and their intelligence operatives.

My friend and I entered the tent. Young European activists, as well as some older ones, were sitting cross-legged or resting their heads on one another at the back of the tent listening to the speaker to a young male representative acting as spokesperson for the

⁹⁹ Mehmet Uzun came to prominence as a novelist before going on to champion the cause of Kurdish language and literature. Having spent most of his working life in exile, in Sweden, Uzun returned to Diyarbakır to die, in 2007.

¹⁰⁰ 'Amed' ('Amidi'/'Media') is an old (pre-7th century), Kurdish/Persian name for Diyarbakır, used by Kurds now as a way of reclaiming the city's identity (from Turkey/Turks) – 'Diyarbakır' itself is a modern Turkification of the earlier 'Diyarbekir', from the Ottoman/Arabic 'Diyâr-ı Bekr').

¹⁰¹ DTP: *Demokratik Toplum Partisi* (Democratic Society Party).

Kurdish youth movement. He was stood upright and delivering his speech in full guerilla outfit: *'We have used our bodies as artillery in this fight,'* he stressed, in a way that suggested both a sense of heroism and a romantic desire for self sacrifice. He repeated that they had been struggling against the state's hegemony and called upon the realization of *'kimlik özgürlük'* and *'önderlik özgürlük'*, referring in one breath to both the ideal of the 'free identity' and of 'free leadership', vowing for the realization of Öcalan's ideological conception of collective freedom through personal liberation, as well as the leader's own personal release from prison. The speaker clearly desired to convince the audience of the liberating role his movement was seeking to play, trying to establish itself not only as a local force, but also as a regional, national and even international liberation movement. Following his long and rather tiring monologue, the floor was handed over to the audience for discussion. A couple of activists put the orator to the test: *'How would you problematize the state?', 'How would you put the idea of 'communalism' into practice?', 'How is this political initiative going to solve the social-economic problems we've seen here during our first encounter with the poor of Diyarbakır?'* they asked. The young male struggled badly, uttering but another ideological battery of words. My friend, who had a background in the political wing of the movement's former DEHAP party (predecessor to the DTP), was clearly irritated by the speaker:

"He presents things as if we have to fight a war first, and only face the real daily life problems of the people second. As if the work of the municipalities and the NGOs are no struggle in themselves? The struggle can't just be fought on one front!"

The observations and impressions of that first night would accompany me in the days to come. Nazan's words had somehow summarized in a very concrete way what the MSF represented: a growing Kurdish socio-political movement of locally-based activists, developing and recreating their own present and future in the light of the perceived failure of Turkey's central political authorities to deliver real change and lack of expectation that this would be forthcoming. The organization of a social forum in the Kurdish heartland and in particular in the city of Diyarbakır/Amed was an act of place-making, as argued by Gambetti in her account of the transformation of the Kurdish movement through its opening up of a space for itself in civic society (Gambetti 2009). It was a reaffirmation of the Kurdish movement's claim on the region's past and future. The Social Forum was being appropriated, I argue, as a method to reinforce as well as represent the Kurdish movement's ideological project for the reconfiguration of the Middle East.

A Social Forum in the heartland of the Kurdish movement

"Wir denken, dass allein die Gründung eines derartigen Forums in unserer Region allen voran KurdInnen, aber auch anderen Menschen und Völkern, einen Rahmen dafür bieten

wird, unsere Stimme erheben zu können und gegenseitiges Vertrauen und Solidarität aufzubauen.”

“We believe that founding this kind of Forum in our region can serve as a framework for Kurds primarily, but also other people and peoples, to increase our voice and to build up mutual confidence and solidarity.” (Sultan Toptaş, member MSF organizing committee, as quoted from his interview in Kurdistan Report, Nr.142, May/June 2009)¹⁰²

The Mesopotamia Social Forum in Diyarbakır, the most important and politicized Kurdish dominated city in Turkey, takes its name from the Kurdish movement’s use of ‘Mesopotamia’ to reference Kurdish populated lands in a way that pre-dates the current arrangement of nation-states. Its employment, therefore, operates in Turkey and transnationally (particularly among the Kurds in Europe) to signify a Kurdish identity, the Kurdist cause.¹⁰³ The MSF credo was expressed in Turkish, in Turkish as ‘*Ya Özgürlük ya hiç*’ – ‘*Freedom or nothing!*’ – to which was joined the international call for ‘*Another World is possible*’.¹⁰⁴ Aiming to function as “*a source of solidarity to stand against mankind’s tyranny over fellow man and nature*,” which had led to “*all forms of decay and destruction*”, the forum represented itself thus:

“[A] range of social initiatives, unions, civil society organizations, local governments, and individuals based in Mesopotamia, the cradle of humanity and for centuries a source of inspiration for the world’s socio-cultural development, our aim is to come together with a growing number of groups worldwide who declare ‘another world is possible.’” (MSF program 2009: 2)

Amongst the signatories of the MSF were many Southeast based associations (human rights and women’s rights groups, environmentalist and poverty issue based organizations, as well as writers’ and media groups) as well as a broad range of workers’ unions (such as *Eğitim-Sen*, *Yapı Yol Sen*, *Genel-İş Sendikası*), the TMMOB Diyarbakır branch, Southeast based cultural centers and cooperatives, the political parties DTP, EMEP, DSİP, EHP, SDP, *Yeşiller Partisi* and representatives of close to all the (then) DTP-led municipalities in the Kurdish inhabited region (MSF program 2009: 15).¹⁰⁵ Although the majority of the panel members consisted, like the audience, of local Kurdish (and Turkish) activists, some hundred foreign activists and associations were also present, such as the Palestinian People’s Solidarity Association (FHDD) and the Palestinian Popular Front for Liberation (FHKC), the Association of Women Committees in Palestine, the Israeli Women’s Coalition for Peace, the Italian *Un Punto Per* and COBAS-Italy, as well as trade unions from Lebanon, and individual anarchists and feminists from several European countries (mainly Germany, but also France, Spain and Italy).

¹⁰² All translations by the author.

¹⁰³ It is used, for example, as the name for a satellite TV channel (‘Mesopotamia TV’), a news agency (MHA, *Mezopotamya Haber Ajansı*), a Facebook page (‘MesopotamiA’), etc.

¹⁰⁴ The GJM website homepage currently uses the cryptic, ‘It IS Possible’. (<http://www.globaljusticemovement.org/index.htm>)

¹⁰⁵ Unions: education, general workers (blue and white collar); TMMOB: engineers’ and architects’ professional association; political parties: Kurdist (DTP, immediate predecessor to the BDP), socialist/communist, greens.

In the run-up to the MSF, calls had been made by the host organizer, the DTP run Greater Municipality of Diyarbakır, to all interested to submit panel proposals. Dozens of meetings were held to mobilize for the forum, in Kurdish cities (such as Batman and Van, and also Erbil in Kurdish [North] Iraq¹⁰⁶), as well as with Armenian, Palestinian and Syrian sympathizers in the neighboring countries.¹⁰⁷ Kurdish activists in Europe, utilizing their existing networks of cooperation with the local civil societies in Germany, Italy, France, Spain and Belgium, called for European activists to participate in the MSF and the Amed International Youth Camp, which was organized simultaneously. Whereas the MSF functioned as a platform to unite different organizations and parties, the Amed International Youth Camp functioned as a means to socialize European activists into the main ideas and goals of the Kurdish movement.

The idea for the Amed Camp had originated in the Kurdistan Solidarity Committee in Berlin. Anti-fascist Germans have cooperated with the Kurdish movement on this committee since 2007, protesting specifically against the cross-border attacks by the Turkish army on the PKK-basis in Iraqi Kurdistan territory, and more generally against other forms of 'militarism'. The Amed Camp sought to bring young activists from Europe to the Kurdish regions in order for them to get them to know the realities on the ground as a way of reinforcing their engagement with the Kurdish movement's causes back home in Europe. *"The aim of the camp was to explain the problems that exist here, as well as the goals of the Movement. That is what the people here wanted to communicate,"* so one of the German militants explained.¹⁰⁸ When many of the Amed Camp organizers were arrested in the KCK operations in the spring and winter of 2009, the MSF became more involved in the organization of the camp.¹⁰⁹

¹⁰⁶ Or, from the Kurdist perspective, Iraqi Kurdistan. For ease of reference, standing state boundaries are assumed here for naming purposes.

¹⁰⁷ These International connections are interesting in the light of the Kurdish movement's armed-to-civic transformation, insofar as they figure deep in PKK history. It was in Syria that the PKK leadership was based for many years (Öcalan fled there from Turkey in 1979, while the party was still being established – he himself was from Urfa, a Turkish province bordering Syria), while the PKK received its first military training in an ex-Palestinian base in Lebanon, supported by Palestinian organizations, including Yasir Arafat's 'Fatah' movement (the first experience in armed combat for the PKK was fighting alongside Palestinians against the Israeli forces which had attacked, in 1982).

¹⁰⁸ Interview by the author, 2 May 2010.

¹⁰⁹ The KCK (*Koma Ciwaken Kurdistan*, Kurdistan Communities Union) was created as part of the organizational restructuring effected by Öcalan from jail after his arrest in 1999 (see Akkaya & Jongerden 2011). Hundreds of Kurdish politicians, activists, etc. were arrested in a series of raids through 2009-10 accused of belonging to the KCK, and by proxy to, or in support of, the PKK, a 'terrorist organization' (raids which culminated in December 2009 with the banning of the DTP). The KCK is supposed to be intended as a transnational structure coordinating political and military activities aimed at winning autonomy for Kurds (the PKK is technically a member organization), but is perceived rather differently in Turkey, as described in this, not unsympathetic piece from the time of the winter arrests: 'The KCK is a buffer organization that was set up to serve as a bridge between the Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK) and the Democratic Society Party (DTP). In other words, it is an organization structured by the PKK with the purpose of entering society, is filled with people that have come down from the mountains and is the place

Local achievements displayed, an example set?

Barkey's (2010) as well as Marcus' (2007), Gambetti's (2008, 2010) and Watts' work (2006, 2010) have testified of the political developments in Turkey's Southeast. Indeed, Barkey has argued that *"In the absence of political progress with the government, the BDP and the Kurds in general are also beginning to put together the rudimentary institutional structures of self-governance in the southeastern provinces."*¹¹⁰ These concrete local developments were fully displayed at the MSF.

Confident in the achievements of the pro-Kurdish party since its 1999 election to local office, the Kurdish movement presented itself at the forum in all its colors. Panels assembling civic activists of the Kurdish movement and visiting activists were set up under titles such as, 'Freedom of expression in Turkey', 'The politicization of the judiciary', 'Civil disobedience experiences, militarism and civil space', 'Alternative municipality and local government experiences' and 'Urban transformation', along with 'Why women's liberation struggle?', 'The ignored identity in Mesopotamia: Kızılbaş Alevism', 'Anti-racist struggles' and 'Labor movements and trade unions in the Middle East'.¹¹¹ From municipal services to the struggle for gender equality and the protest against heritage and environmental destruction, successful actions were discussed and ongoing political, military, and judicial obstructions criticized.

I recall from the speakers in the panels statements exemplary of the affirmation sought for what they considered the achievements of the movement: 'We have installed in our people consciousness about the importance of nature and historical heritage!'; 'We negotiate with the people in our municipalities, this has never been the case before!'; 'The experiences we have had here in Diyarbakır are important examples to implement amongst the Kurdish immigrants in Istanbul'; 'The kind of political organization we have got here should be transported to the west of Turkey'; 'The alternative press should be united'; 'The Kurdish press will be the alternative press of Turkey.'

Similar 'success stories', such as that of Mexico's Zapatistas were referred to, suggesting parallels between the indigenous struggle against the Mexican government and American imperialism on the other side of the Atlantic, and the Kurdish movement's own struggle for autonomy from the Turkish state. As a symbol for the anti-globalization movement, the Zapatistas figured as a reference point throughout the Camp and the MSF. Not only was the Zapatista slogan '*Edi Beşe*' (Enough! Ya Basta!) appropriated, but also its activities displayed in a photo exhibition, as well as on stage and in the panels. A German representative of the organization *Ya Basta! Network of solidarity with the*

where legal Kurdish politics turns to find men that will work for it. In a sense, it is an urbanized 2010 version of the PKK' (Hüseyin Yayman, Today's Zaman, 1.1.2010).

¹¹⁰ BDP: *Barış ve Demokrasi Partisi* (Peace and Democracy Party), successor to the DTP.

¹¹¹ For the MSF website, see: <http://www.msf.web.tr/msf-en/>

Zapatistas gave an account of the functioning of the autonomous districts under Zapatista control and its acting independently of the central Mexican state. The Zapatista movement is assumed to have inspired PKK' leader Öcalan in developing his own political concepts that sought to re-invent and re-energize his organization (Gambetti 2009).

The MSF was envisioned by its organizers as the starting point of a broad social movement for the whole of the Middle East, in which the Kurdish movement – similar to the Zapatista's – will play a vanguard role. The call for the MSF, signed by numerous Kurdish municipalities and local civil society organizations, depicted the region of the Near East and Mesopotamia as suffering from centralistic and theocratic structures that have denied the existences of the different peoples and turned the region into 'a graveyard of peoples'. Referring, to the political structures of the modern nation-state the call goes on to assert that "*Capitalist modernity and political models based on the nation-state, supported by the West as a solution to theocratic structures, have been unsuccessful in bringing stability, just as they have been unable to democratize the Middle East [...]*" (MSF program 2009:2).

By means of the MSF, the region of Mesopotamia is re-imagined as a political space to be (re-)appropriated and transformed. Tellingly, the MSF official program cover displayed an image of the Mesopotamia region, incorporating Syria, Iran, Iraq and Israel-Palestine, but leaving out the western part of Turkey.¹¹² Indeed, one of its main organizers confirmed that the MSF intended to reclaim Mesopotamia as a place for the creation of a new civilization and that the main means to this end is would be the initiation of a new social movement in the Middle East through the social forum.¹¹³

Ideological transformations put into practice?

MSF philosophy has it that the state apparatus – regarded as in decay – is to be abandoned, and the personal liberation of individuals as a people is to accelerate this process. "*States do not solve problems but create them,*" one of the organizers explained to me. He continued

"The organizations that are connected to the Kurdish movement are civil organizations because **in principle** we seek to develop ties with the social parts of society and **not** with the governmental ones. We want to reach out to the grassroots. We think that social

¹¹² This is the 'Fertile Crescent' version of Mesopotamia, i.e. defined by the eastern Mediterranean as well as the Tigris/Euphrates (and not including central Anatolia). Mesopotamia motifs used in the Kurdish movement more often show only the rivers area, similar to the maps of Kurdistan (i.e. not the eastern Mediterranean).

¹¹³ Tuncay Ok, personal communication, 29 April 2010.

movements are more effective in addressing the problems, whereas states are profit organizations.” (Tuncay Ok, 29 April 2010, Diyarbakır, author’s stress).

Essentially, what is sought is ‘governance by the people’ instead of ‘government of populations’. The ideal is some form of communalism. Therefore, politics should be initiated from the local level. This means, in practice, that the municipalities become the means of governance by the people, instead of acting as the local representatives of a far-away, centrally organized state authority.

“Processes and ideologies of the past should be overcome. In the past we had a hierarchical understanding of the state, but people are longing for democracy, equality and a world of ecological and gender balance. Because of its heterogeneous structure, the grassroots can produce a way out of the current situation (...) We have to leave the state apparatus behind and go beyond the state. We should accelerate the decline of the state that is already ongoing. (...) The local municipalities are not the departments of the state but places where the local population has something to say! States are the subject of violence and this has become controversial. Instead we opt for local governance and this is not in order to feed or help the state. Local municipalities are more than local service providers and they do not reflect the central state. They are based on governance that involves everyone. The municipal councils receive assemblies of women, youth, children... who can take decisions as individuals. This is the free local government model. First we change our own localities, then we go on changing the whole world. We can start with the organization of confederalism from within Kurdistan.” (Demir Çelik, one of the founders of the BDP and BDP president at the time of the MSF, from his speech on the panel on alternative municipalities, 27th of September 2009).

Indeed, Jongerden and Akkaya have persuasively argued that the primary objective of the PKK is still an independent Kurdistan, but that the road to this end is no longer sought by means of state-building, but *society-building*: today the PKK organizational structure does not aim at the establishment of classical state but the construction of what is called ‘Kurdistan Democratic Society’, initiated from below (Jongerden & Akkaya 2011: 156). This is sought by means of the project for ‘democratic confederalism’, build on the ideal self-government of local communities and organized in the form of open councils, town councils, local parliaments and congresses (ibid: 153). The Turkish state, but ‘states’ more generally, are held responsible for all forms of subordination.

The final declaration of the MSF stated:

“We believe that in order to remove the obstacles in front of economy, society, language, free thought and the basis for democratic relations and to overcome artificial borders among the peoples in the Middle East and Mesopotamia, a free Mesopotamia and peace in the Middle East is most needed,”

This refers to this idea of ‘democratic confederalism’ which the Kurdish movement would like to realize and promote throughout the region. In order to democratize, so it is argued, Kurds have to reshape themselves and develop a democratic mentality free of hierarchical power relations and patriarchy. The idea of democratic confederalism was

developed by Abdullah Öcalan, who, since his imprisonment, has sought to transform the main ideological ideas of the Kurdish movement.¹¹⁴ Öcalan's primary philosophical approach has been through an engagement with political thinkers that have inspired the anti-globalization or global justice movement, such as Antonio Negri and Michael Hardt's 'anti-globalization bibles' *Empire* and *Multitude*. Thus, he plays out the post-nationalist card, depicting nationalism and capitalist modernity as responsible for the backwardness of the Middle East and the ongoing dictatorial regimes.

It is in this post-nationalist, anti-globalist/capitalist framework that Öcalan re-imagines the struggle of his own movement, in terms of the awakening of Kurds, as a civilizing and liberating source in the world – in reference to Frantz Fanon's insistence of the necessity of acts of revolutionary violence to emancipate the wretched of the earth and allow them to become the leaders of their own histories (Scheper-Hughes & Bourgois 2008: 17).¹¹⁵ While explaining Kurdish nationalism as a modern phenomena and warning of the dangers he considers inherent in all forms of nationalism, however, including Kurdish nationalism, Öcalan nevertheless depicts Kurds as one of the most ancient peoples of the world, and reiterates their history as legitimizing the contemporary, i.e. as explanatory of and therefore justifying Kurdish existence (identity) and the political demands of its (Öcalan's) movement (Öcalan 2008).¹¹⁶ The employment of a (pre-)historical mythology of an identified ethnic group in the service of its present-day claims is, one cannot fail to note, a classical ingredient of nationalist narration.¹¹⁷

In his prison writings, Öcalan calls for the freedom of 'religions', 'ethnic groups' and 'minorities' to organize themselves. No longer is it a state that is to be fought for, but the self-organization of Kurds as Kurds – having liberated themselves through a disengagement from the hegemony of the state and societal hierarchies. Conceptually, this ideological transformation is represented by the shift in emphasis away from 'Kurdistan' towards 'Mesopotamia'. Practically, this ambition is given shape in the municipalities run by the pro-Kurdish party, where a substantive, alternative Kurdish social and political space has come into being, nurturing the sense of 'being Kurdish' and fleshing out the reality of what it means to be 'Kurdish', and thus realizing the idea of a people, actively constituting a nation. Obviously, this raises questions such as those

¹¹⁴ Öcalan's thoughts were recorded by his lawyers and distributed through the Kurdist (PKK, etc) organizational networks, eventually to materialize in book form, translated into German and English from the early 2000s.

¹¹⁵ The image of Mesopotamia as the 'cradle of civilization' obviously resonates strongly with this. Indeed, Öcalan's prison work has concentrated significantly on the perspective of an ancient regional (Sumerian) history, and the recent popularization of the Mesopotamia concept (as well as that of confederalism) is testimony to his continuing influence in the Kurdish movement.

¹¹⁶ Indeed, Öcalan's prison work has concentrated significantly on the perspective of an ancient regional (Sumerian) history, and the recent popularization of the Mesopotamia concept (as well as that of confederalism) certainly appears to be testimony to his continuing influence in the Kurdish movement.

¹¹⁷ Implying, of course, that 'Mesopotamia' also is employed by the Kurdish movement as myth (in an anthropological sense of the term, i.e. to construct a collective consciousness, and without any reference to veracity).

linked to concepts of ethno-nationality suggested of Öcalan's work. It certainly appears somewhat paradoxical, if not plain contradictory, for example, that the new ideological ideals of the Kurdish movement criticizing any kind of state formation are at the same time functioning as the explanatory framework for the proto-state that is being locally developed. Indeed, Watts has already pointed out that whereas the DTP (now BDP) mayors seek to de-Turkify their municipalities, they are at the same time developing their own instruments of governmentality in order to manage, control and Kurdify the local population (Watts 2006). In the mayors' defense, it can of course be argued that, sensitized by the consciousness of decades of oppression – and for the older ones especially, this has been very much a lived consciousness – at least they are enacting the new nationalism – if that is what it is – in a more democratic, tolerant fashion than had previously been the case with the old one.¹¹⁸ In other words, huge shifts have taken place in the political landscape of southeast Turkey, there is an ongoing process of radical reform, but perhaps the revolution has not started quite yet.

A vanguard role: re-inventing itself as a (international) liberation movement?

The ideological shift taken by PKK leadership during the 2000s resonates with the main goals of the Global Justice Movement, in particular its search for alternative forms of democracy that allow direct participation of citizens (Della Porta 2005, 2007). The stress on the ideal of a state-less society and the bottom-up organization of the people is central to this change within the Kurdish movement, from a classical separatist struggle for the establishment of its own state, towards a new conceptualization of post-state democracy. This affects the relationship of the Kurdish movement towards state and non-state actors alike: a (partial) disengagement from interaction with state-actors is complimented by a (re-)engagement with non-state actors. As MSF organizer Ok confirms:

“The state has long been an object of discussion amongst the Kurds. But the state aspect of the nineties and today's are entirely different. And yes, this reflects itself in our approach to state actors. We used to do diplomacy and have a foreign relations approach. Today things are totally different” (Tuncay Ok, personal communication, 29 April 2010).

Indeed, the MSF testifies to intensified relations not only between local and regional civil society actors, but also with national and international ones. This was also evident during the MSF panels and workshops, with many calls to unite and join forces. The pro-Kurdish party DTP and its successor BDP have been a constitutive part of the network of organizations and parties that make-up the 'altermondialists' in Turkey and take part in the Global Justice Movement. Fuelled by a particularly strong anti-American sentiment (and now, also, disillusionment with the EU, as well as distrust of the IMF), Turkey's

¹¹⁸ The involvement of Armenian sympathizers at the MSF may suggest this, as certainly have recent DTP municipality attempts at multi-lingual (i.e. not just Kurdish) local service provision (which the state judiciary has worked to prevent).

anti-globalization movement consists of a range of groups and alliances, not dissimilar to the rainbow coalition emerging in other parts of the world. In Turkey, this includes the various organizations represented at the MSF (above), in addition to several other radical and extreme leftist parties,¹¹⁹ unions and union confederations,¹²⁰ and pressure groups,¹²¹ as well as, interestingly, perhaps, from the Western point of view, professional associations¹²² (Lelandais 2008). The presence of the Kurdish movement in the anti-globalization movement in Turkey has been considered indispensable by its constitutive parts, even though it is known to have led to tensions (Lelandais, 2008).¹²³

The relations that are being developed by the Kurdish movement with non-governmental organizations and activists in and outside of Turkey through the Global Justice Movement are partly a re-enactment of both longstanding relations with the Turkish left (see Jongerden & Akkaya 2011) and of the 1980s and 90s solidarity networks that developed in Europe between European based civil society actors and the Kurdish movement in different EU member-states where Kurdish activists had found political asylum (see Grojean 2008, Eccarius-Kelly 2002, Östergaard-Nielsen 2003). In contrast to what has gone before, though, the information and coalition-building in the interaction with activist groups is no longer primarily defined by stories of injustice and violations of basic human rights, but by Kurdish activists displaying confidence in the freedoms already achieved and portraying their successes and ongoing struggles as examples, thereby drawing up a particular image of themselves and their political project. As Demir Çelik argued: *'We want to be a universal human movement. We perceive ourselves as universal actors.'* And thus the conclusion that the Mesopotamia Social Forum was very much a means to consolidate their perceived achievements – and to address the obstacles still to be overcome – as well as a means through which the Kurdish movement seeks to reposition itself as a (utopian) leftist(?) liberation movement for Turkey, the (northwestern) Middle East and the world at large.

¹¹⁹ E.g. ÖDP (*Özgürlük ve Dayanışma Partisi*, the Freedom and Solidarity Party), which has had some, limited election success; and DSİP (*Devrimci Sosyalist İşçi Partisi*, the Revolutionary Socialist Workers' Party), a Trotskyite international socialist grouping, which supported the independent Kurdish candidates (later DTP members) in the last national election.

¹²⁰ E.g. KESK (*Kamu Emekçileri Sendikaları Konfederasyonu*, the Confederation of Public Workers' Unions), and DİSK (*Türkiye Devrimci İşçi Sendikaları Konfederasyonu*, the Confederation of Revolutionary Trade Unions of Turkey), both major union federations, with a combined membership of over half a million.

¹²¹ E.g. Mazlumder (*İnsan Hakları ve Mazlumlara İçin Dayanışma Derneği*, The Organization of Human Rights and Solidarity for Oppressed People), and *Halkevleri* (lit. Public Houses), a long established association of local cultural centers, originally developed as part of the new republic's national (rural) modernization program, later radicalized, closed down and reopened, and now going under slogans like *'Hak Mücadeleleri'* (The Fight for Rights).

¹²² E.g. TTB (*Türk Tabipleri Birliği*, the Turkish Physicians Association), like the TMMOB (note 8), close to the leftist parties.

¹²³ Turkish nationalism is such a strongly indoctrinated mainstream force that it easily colors the perceptions of alternative and otherwise radical movements.

By way of conclusion

The above outlined observations do leave us with a number of questions. First of all, it still remains unclear how the re-positioning of the Kurdish movement is being conceived and lived by other activist groups and organizations on the left. Is the vanguard-role the Kurdish movement seeks to play considered a positive development or is it, oppositely, rekindling old fears that they might find themselves subject to monopolization? Surely, the answer to this question will relate to the degree in which there is really room for political contestation, and thus depends on the way in which instruments like social forums are indeed employed for the creation of 'open spaces' (Wallerstein 2004), rather than just as a means of enclosure and recuperation.

Secondly, it would be worth studying the ways in which the new turn of the movement, with its relation to the GJM, is the outcome of an interplay between the various relationships of the structures and dynamics involved, including the learning processes of Kurdish activists in the municipalities, transnational initiatives undertaken from within the municipalities and their support by and input from Europe-based Kurdish activists, as well as the longstanding relations between the Kurdish movement and the left. To what extent is the abstract ideological transformation initiated by the PKK leadership a starting point for the Kurdish movement's transformation into a primarily socio-political movement, as opposed to an outcome of it? To what extent are Öcalan's ideas directing and/or employed to give a meaning to local changes? Or might Öcalan be the one employing or claiming the developments of the past decade in the development of his alternative post-national project?

Thirdly, we might wonder how the utopian zeal of the Kurdish movement's activists is being translated to the grassroots in ways that address their nationalist feelings and senses of belonging to a deprived nation. Is the new ideology primarily shared among militants and civil activists of the movement, and if so, what efforts are being made to actively translate and reframe these ideas to the local needs in relation to the public at large? How do these ideas resonate amongst the people of Diyarbakır, Van, or Batman? And if the initiatives are indeed strongly ideologically informed, what room do they ultimately leave for bottom-up participation and contestation? These and many more questions are worth considering in order to understand this fascinating aspect of the important regional developments currently underway in Turkey's Southeast.

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Conclusion

Conclusion

In looking at the Kurdish nationalist movement's transnational political activism, this research has tried to uncover how Turkish Kurds are taking advantage of the structural dynamics of the relationship between the EU and Turkey in order to press forward their political claims. The research has looked into the kind of diplomatic activities that have been and are being developed by Kurdish activists inside the European institutions in order to affect the European Union's negotiations with Turkey over its possible accession. Therefore, attention was paid to the developmental history and a contemporary analysis of discourse, strategies and network building by the Kurdish political activist elite at different levels of political organization. Beyond the framework of the EU accession negotiations, I have sought to discuss more generally how the Kurdish nationalist movement has sought to internationalize its cause, engaging with challenges and changes.

This conclusion is organized as follows. Firstly, I engage with an assessment of the findings of the first part of the PhD, the quest to transform Turkey through Europe. I discuss how my findings relate to the field of transnationalism studies; from there I develop so-called 'testable statements' or hypotheses for future research. Future (comparative) research should prove how typical or atypical my findings on the transnational political activities of the Kurdish nationalist movement as translated into these statements are for the phenomenon of transnational political activism in general. I thus try to show the ways in which my research is able to contribute to the production of knowledge on transnationalism, paying particular attention to the role of the EU therein. Secondly, I engage with the second part of the PhD, the challenges facing and opportunities open to the Kurdish movement's internationalization of the Kurdish cause, incorporating the last three chapters. Here, specific attention is drawn to the (contradictory) effects for homeland political actors of the EU's involvement in Turkey's domestic affairs. I try also here to develop new hypotheses for future research from my findings which can be of particular relevance for the study of European integration and studies that engage with the transnational political activism of homeland (oppositional) actors and Europe-based activists in respect of the process toward accession of states to EU membership. Finally on the basis of my findings and my past years as a 'political observer' of Turkey's domestic and EU affairs, I conclude by engaging with future prospects for Turkey's EU accession negotiations and the (re)solution to its Kurdish question.

Transforming Turkey through Europe

In the first part of this PhD, I have explored how the European Institutions have become a site of political contestation for Turkey's Kurdish nationalist movement. Indeed, since the early 1980s Turkey's domestic politics have been under EU scrutiny and this, I have argued, has been in large part due to the activists' pursuit of the support of politicians (from the regional to European levels). The chapters on the Kurdish question in the European Parliament (Chapter 2), and on the importance of 'political gatekeepers' in homeland politics (Chapter 1), as well as the particular case-study of Mayor Demirbaş' symbolic politics employed to set up and rally around multilingual municipal services (Chapter 3), all attest to the role of agency in transnational political activism by Turkey's Kurdish nationalist movement. The various agents involved in transnational political activities no longer remain faceless actors. They are shown to be contextually-bounded yet not structurally determined in their actions, actively creating spaces of political engagement.

a) The agents

Of the agents of transnational politics, the Kurdistan Workers' Party is clearly the most important in this case. The organization has shown itself to be transnationally organized, with an established and institutionalized presence across several countries in Europe as well as in Turkey and its southeastern neighbors, having managed to both monopolize the space for political mobilization (see Grojean 2008), and also dominate the political pro-Kurdish lobbying activities. The first three chapters of this PhD testify especially to the mobility of Kurdish activists across Turkey and Europe and inside Turkey. PKK militants are active between the European capital (Brussels) and other European cities where Kurds are settled and its nationalist movement spread over the course of the years. This mobility is evidenced in the coordinated actions of the PKK on the European soil, not only with regards to political mobilization (Grojean, 2008 and 2009) but also to pro-Kurdish political lobbying work. The same is true also of the Turkish Kurdish party politicians connected to the PKK. Not only are PKK operatives highly mobile, but also the mayors and MPs of the DTP/BDP, the Kurdish party related to the PKK. The case of Mayor Demirbaş is exemplary of this transnational mobility, turning a locally elected mayor into an important figure in the Kurdish nationalist movement's division of 'Foreign Affairs'. Equally also, it should perhaps be noted, the NGOs involved in pro-Kurdish advocacy (such as the Human Rights Association) require of their members flexibility of location, temporary stays and recurring visits across different countries, in order to liaise face-to-face with individuals and organizations, physically attend meetings, etc, and thus also contribute to the overall mobility of the movement, if only at its peripheries.

Often met with suspicion, in particular in the current post 9/11 context (but also before that, with its eventual prohibition in Germany and France), the (implicit) presence of the

PKK in this lobbying activity has not been regarded as unproblematic. The international terrorist designation has had particularly problematic consequences for pro-Kurdish politics, tending to marginalize the Kurdish nationalist movement both at home and abroad. The PKK's efforts to impact upon EU policies have nevertheless been continuous (Chapter 5 and Chapter 2).

PKK lobbying in the European national and EU contexts is not immediately apparent. Because of the terrorist status, for example, individual lobbyists cannot be self-proclaimed PKK members or Kurdish organizations affiliated to the illegal organization. The PKK presence has a clandestine character. Furthermore, Kurdish nationalist demands have tended to be forwarded through 'bona fide' non-PKK agencies, viz., the PKK related, recognized Kurdish political party in Turkey, and other (non- or little or at least not overtly PKK related) Kurdist or at least pro-Kurdish organizations. Firstly, successful lobbying has very much been in the hands of the Kurdish activists elected into office since the early 1990s. Particularly if we look into the involvement of the European Parliament in Turkey's Kurdish question, we find that it is mostly since the election into the Turkish Grand National Assembly of Kurdish party representatives, as well as the later election of Kurdish mayors in 1999, that members of European Parliament have showed themselves most open to the plight of Kurds in Turkey. Indeed, it was the judicial prosecution and confinement of Kurdish MPs in the early 1990s that catapulted the issue into prominence in the EU. The case-study of Mayor Demirbaş considered here (Chapter 3) testifies to the important transnational role the Kurdish political representatives of the PKK affiliated party (then DTP, now BDP) have come to play in the internationalization of Turkey's Kurdish question and in the obtainment of European support for the Kurdish nationalist movement's political agenda.

Elected people's representatives have been attributed much higher credentials than militants and sympathizers of the armed insurgency movement, for reasons that are not difficult to ascertain. First, popular support for the Kurdish political parties is considered proven by the very fact of their members being elected into office. Elected representatives from the homeland enjoy more credibility than the self-appointed representatives active within Europe based associations. Second, support for the 'formal' political actors comes at a much lower cost for politicians in Europe – especially now, given the political difficulty, if not impossibility, for elected representatives of being seen to support a 'terrorist organization'. And third, the involvement of European parliament members attest to a solidarity towards people regarded as fellow politicians (as co-parliamentarians or mayors) and thus equals – in contrast to the revolutionary militants of an outlawed guerrilla organization.

Dealing with Kurdish politicians therefore, European politicians have had to prevaricate on the relationship of their Kurdish counterparts with the PKK, generally with a 'selective blindness' or 'head in the sand' approach, as noted here (Chapter 2). This reflects the ambiguity of the Kurdish party in Turkey on the same issue. Necessitated by

the prohibition of 'the guerrilla', as it is referred to by supporters, and the ease and alacrity with which parties have been closed down and politicians interned in Turkey, the precise relationship of the Kurdish party to the PKK has always been unclear. European prevarication on this is also in accord with the conventional contemporary political doublespeak (again, observed in Turkey) of 'not speaking to terrorists', which often really means communicating through indirect channels but maintaining an official denial of this. Some of these issues are considered in the Appendixes (1 & 2).

Rather similar considerations hold also for the INGOs and Turkey based NGOs involved (through them) in Kurdish related issues in Europe and the EU. These also are welcomed, or at least accepted, by European politicians working in formal institutional frameworks, insofar as (I)NGOs themselves are accepted as constituting one part of the formal institutional framework of civil society. Their presence in the corridors of power is not problematic, even if, perhaps, it less often extends to the tables of decision-making. These (I)NGOs have varying relations with the PKK (below), and it certainly cannot be said that they simply do the PKKs bidding. Some do work for the Kurdish nationalist cause, however, which I have found is, as stated, still dominated by the PKK and generally led by the militants more than any other group or body, albeit from the shadows.

EU advocacy of the Kurdish cause thus appears to be in the hands of the Kurdist politicians, along with associations and recognized NGOs. The genealogy of the political support (Chapter 1), nevertheless leads me to conclude that non-PKK affiliated Europe based Kurdish associations (such as the Kurdish Institute of Brussels) of the so-called Diaspora have been of fundamental importance for the successful political organization of the oppositional homeland political actors. Kurdish nationalist demands have tended to be forwarded through (non-PKK) Kurdish diasporic organizations preparing the way and, so to speak, oiling the political wheels. It is their role as mediators in relation to the political and civil society of the country of settlement which ensures that the transnational political activism is welcomed and sustained over time. It is the small numbers of activists inside such associations that provide the access to politicians and civic activists, by means of the networks they have established, the trust they have built, and the efforts they have made to translate the homeland demands in such a way as to resonate with the concerns and worldviews of the 'political gatekeepers' (Chapter 1), and thus hold the key for the Kurdish demands to find entries into (national) political parties and parliamentary discussions and debates (through the politicians). Throughout this process, the PKK is ever-present, even when it is not present.

The relationship between the PKK and these other actors – the Kurdish party politicians the INGOs and NGOs in Turkey, and the European non-PKK associations – in shaping and executing the lobbying is unclear, again necessarily given the impossibility of any transparent, formally stated relationship. The Europe based associations seem primarily to be accommodating the homeland political actors and their (transnational) political

opposition in respect of the lobbying work, and thus do not, so far as I have been able to find out, seriously determine the direction(s) of the Kurdish movement's politics. Their political role in the movement is essentially instrumental. The same is most probably true in general for Turkey based NGOs, even those that have been criticized as over-politicized, including by Europe – although their role may be gaining in directive importance, insofar as they are working with the Kurdish politicians to formulate policies. The Turkey based Kurdish politicians, on the other hand, *have* been crucial in the strategy of framing local problems in terms of a denial of human rights, and also minority rights and the lack of (regional) democracy on the part of the Turkish (political and judicial) authorities. Thus have they also tapped into the transnational advocacy networks of (international) human rights associations (Chapters 3 and 4), and municipalities striving for increased local autonomy (Chapter 3).

b) The effect

Initially this research aimed at assessing the 'impact' of this kind of transnational political activism through the EU on Turkey's approach towards its Kurdish issue. From the onset this proved difficult to assess. As I tried to demonstrate in the chapters on the Kurdish question in the European Parliament and with the Demirbaş-case, it is indeed possible to see how Kurdish transnational political activism has and can be fruitful to the degree that it leads to an increased awareness of specific issues (in particular human rights violations) and a sensitivity to the Kurdish cause generally amongst European lawmakers. The way in which this has translated back into the Turkish Kurdish reality, however, is another matter.

The question is whether and to what extent the criticisms from the EU – primarily from within the European Parliament, Council of Europe and European Commission – have led Turkey to change its approach and its policies. Obviously Turkey has, particularly at the end of the 1990s and the beginning of the 2000s and under continuous pressure from the EU, engaged with a number of necessary reforms to democratize the country, which have benefited Kurdish citizens. But this does not mean that we can easily assess, let alone 'measure' the direct impact of transnational political activism. This is so because we cannot single out EU pressure from the many other concerns and power plays that have affected Turkey's domestic policies, and nor also easily the level to which this (EU pressure) been informed by the transnational politics of the Kurds. On the basis of my findings however, I would conclude that transnational political activism has indeed mattered and continues to matter.

Regarding the relevance of Kurdish nationalist lobbying to the EU pressure on Turkey, it does need to be stated that it is impossible to know for sure how much the issue of human rights would have been emphasized by European bodies in respect of Turkey's accession process anyway, regardless of the Kurdish lobbying, given that this is built into the structure of the Copenhagen Criteria. For one thing, European opponents of

Turkey's prospective membership would all too readily use the human rights issue as a rationalization for their reluctance to proceed with accession negotiations (not entirely unlike, perhaps, the way the Kurdish movement has itself used this issue as a lever on EU decision-making processes). My analysis of EU activities (Chapter 2), however, suggests that, as a point of fact, this has not been the case, as it seems clearly to be the Parliament which has taken the lead in this matter of Turkey's human rights record, and the parties and groupings sponsoring the dozens of motions and resolutions have not been those opposed to or deeply ambiguous about Turkey's joining the EU in principle. Basically, this type of opposition to Turkey in the EU comes from the right of the political spectrum, the Christian Democrats and Conservatives, while sponsorship of the motions and resolutions has come from the left and center, from the (regional) nationalists, socialists, greens and liberals. Furthermore, the contact between this broad 'coalition', or at least its leftist half, and the Kurdish nationalists – as detailed in the Flemish/Belgian case (Chapter 1) – testifies to the importance of the Kurdish issue in particular in the European Parliament's concerns with Turkey's human rights record and ongoing situation (as opposed, that is, to general human rights concerns, non-specific to or unfocused on Kurds and Turkey's Southeast).

The relevance of EU pressure to Turkey's internal political landscape and the changes introduced that bear on the Kurdish issue is more difficult to fathom. Ultimately, I have had to steer clear of any in-depth analysis of this, as really it constitutes a project in itself. As a result of my research, however, I do feel able to conclude, albeit tentatively, that EU pressure has been instrumental here, but also itself both subject to and object of Turkey's own internal political process. Without doubt, the EU has constantly insisted on relevant reforms, and (some of) these have been undertaken, and a major – perhaps *the* major – reason for the reforms on Turkey's part has been their necessity in order to proceed with the EU application. However, the way in which the pace of reform dropped after the hurdle of opening accession negotiations was crossed, and other anti-democratic moves by the governing AKP (Chapters 4 and 5, Appendixes 1 and 2), lead one to suspect a lack of sincerity on the part of the government, and thus to a questioning of its true motivation.

As a party with Islamist roots, the AKP during its first years in power found the EU as useful an ally as has the Kurdish nationalists – in the case of the AKP, as a political guarantor against the Kemalist establishment (the army, particularly), ensuring its (parliamentary) sovereignty in governance. Since then, the party has established itself in the organs of state, become more self-confident and responded rather little to continued EU demands for further reform. Democrats in Turkey (including many NGOs, such as human rights organizations) certainly appear to be deeply ambivalent about the democratic credentials of the AKP government. And the more recent moves by the AKP government to deal with the Kurdish issue, the Kurdish/Democratic Opening, seem to have been propelled more by a felt need to respond to the Kurdish party's electoral success than anything coming out of Europe (see also the background papers below).

In respect of the Kurdish issues, these considerations do play out against the background of a political power battle for the Southeast between the AKP and Kurdish nationalists, making it even more difficult to determine ‘who is playing who’ – how far the hugely powerful EU is forcing reform, and how far the relatively fixed EU position is dynamically appropriated and subtly manipulated within the country by the leading (regional) actors. Equally, EU support for the AKP government in the framework (and world order) of state-to-state relations, mean that EU emphasis on internal reform in Turkey may itself be subject to a restraining influence. Thus – and this relates back to the previous topic of how the EU position is determined – the Kurdish nationalist success in having Turkey’s human rights record highlighted may currently be off set by a negative, essentially invisible, achievement by the government in having it downplayed, sidelined, paid lip service to, essentially buried under the red herring of ‘terrorism’ and the greater good that the AKP is seen in Europe to represent. That is why an issue like the organizational structuring of human rights is so important (Chapter 4, below).

Hypotheses for future research

On the basis of the findings that are laid out in the first part of this PhD we can develop a number of so-called ‘testable statements’ (Payne & Williams, 2005) or hypotheses, as described in the methodological section, which, through future research, might prove true or false for other cases of transnational political activism. This allows for a future examination of how typical or atypical the findings reported here on the Kurdish nationalist movement’s transnational activism are of the studies of transnationalism and thus how the research into this case contributes to the general knowledge production about transnational political activism.

To begin with, the case of the Flemish nationalist movement’s support for Turkey’s Kurds and their nationalist movement has attested to the importance of political activism directed towards politicians at the regional and national level of EU-member states to create (and maintain) political support at the EU level. It would be instructive to learn how the establishment and organization of networks of trust and support have found their translation into support inside the European Parliament in other countries (especially Germany and Sweden, given the level of Turkish Kurdish political organization in these member states). A first hypothesis suggested by this research, therefore, is that political activism on the part of national minorities – and by other marginalized groups, such as non-heterosexuals (GLBT) – in countries in the EU orbit (specifically, prospective member-states) – and also, for that matter, within the EU – will tend to be successful insofar as it directed towards receptive (sub-)national politicians and parties, and manages to forge long-term relationships with them (and, conversely, will not be successful insofar as it does not).

With regards to the 'political gatekeepers', my research of the Flemish (nationalist) politicians' engagement with the Kurdish cause revealed that a commitment to the causes of ethnic minorities (the 'long-term relationship') does not necessarily depend on the electoral significance of a particular ethnic group in the country of settlement. Strong ideological beliefs embedded in the tradition of a political party (in casu the People's Union) and personal exposure to the suffering of a certain group can combine to constitute strong incentives for the support of politicians in countries of settlement. The extent to which the 'Flemish-Kurdish nexus' is an exceptional case, or, contrarily, is able to provide us a more general insight into the motives behind the actions of 'political gatekeepers', makes for a second testable statement: there is more to political commitment than electoral rewards and it is thus instructive to inquire into the personal motivations of politicians through testimonies of and inquiries into their political involvement and voluntarism, especially in the context of their party's traditional values and self-defined mission. More generally, it is most revealing to engage in a study of the genealogy of political support for specific causes. What turns (some) politicians (and their parties) into 'political gatekeepers' that grant (homeland) political activists access to the political society of the countries of settlement (and others not)?

Thirdly my findings on Kurdish transnational political activism problematize concepts as 'diaspora politics' or 'immigrant transnationalism', given the important and defining role of a homeland political actor, that is, the Kurdistan Workers' Party. The question is then whether the Kurdish nationalist movement comprises a specific, atypical case study within transnationalism studies or the contrary, whether other cases of transnational political activism are equally strongly determined by one transnationally organized political actor? Or, put differently, are transnational political organizations in so-called 'diaspora politics' an underestimated force, obfuscating the strength of homeland political actors? If so, how has this remained largely unaddressed? This is of particular relevance insofar as it will be misleading to regard the successful lobbying in the name of a minority or another particular group as the outcome of a strong diasporic organization, if in reality the lobbying is very much steered by one (or a small number of) homeland political organization(s).

Consequently, the question arises of how many studies of 'diaspora politics' are indeed telling us something about 'immigrants' and 'refugees', rather than about homeland political actors and their particular agendas (or about their inter-relationships, or about their virtually defined socio-political spaces)? This suggests a third testable statement. If homeland political actors do prove to be – in general – much more important than has until now been assumed in European case studies of transnationalism and diaspora politics, then it clearly behoves researchers to pay much more attention to the changing political conditions in the homeland (and less to the political opportunity structures of the countries of settlement). Thus, how do the changes in the homeland structure the transnational political lobbying (as we know they do for political mobilization)? And, similarly, for those countries linked to the European Union (as current or prospective

member states), it is important to conceive how the EU becomes a structuration point for transnational political activism, shaping the political discourse of those seeking political change in the homeland. In other words, it could be very helpful (in terms of its EU policy implications) to develop future research into the particular ways in which EU accession negotiations does and might shape transnational political activism, with a view to producing desired results in the country desiring to accede. Also of potential value would be research directed at looking into how transnational political activism transforms the transnational political activists.

Fourthly, my research findings problematize the assumed divides between transnationalism and transnational advocacy networks. It is surprising that so few studies on 'diaspora' and transnationalism have engaged with the importance of transnational advocacy networks for particular groups to gain international leverage. Therefore, a strong third testable statement would be that research into transnational political activism should always incorporate questions with regards to the role of international non-governmental organizations (INGOs) and international institutions (precisely because the importance of these can, it is apparent, be so easily disregarded) Paying greater attention to the role of INGOs and the advocacy networks transnational political activists are part of, as well as to international institutions, such as the European Union, would ensure that transnationalism studies incorporate the often multilevel character of the political spaces that are being created through transnational political activism (i.e. incorporating multiple sites and levels of political organization instead of falling into the trap of methodological nationalism, which confines the study of transnationalism to the dynamics between two nation-states). Here then, I would postulate the hypothesis that attention to the multilevel character of transnational political activism allows us to go beyond methodological nationalism and territorialism.

Fifth, it would be interesting to research other cases of transnational political activism by oppositional political parties against the background of the EU accession negotiations. How does their transnational political activism affect the political decision making inside the EU institutions? How, for example, do Croatian or Macedonian political (opposition) parties try to affect their country's candidacy for EU membership and the negotiations during this pre-accession period? Do they organize in a similar fashion? How do they tap into the political discourses and concerns of EU politicians? And, retrospectively, how did political opposition parties of the current new member states of Eastern Europe try to affect the agenda-setting of the EU in relation to their governments? What kind of guarantees have they been able to obtain for the protection of rights of ethnic or linguistic minorities, for example? In what ways has the EU provided similar politically marginalized groups within (former) candidate member states with means to advocate their rights? I assume that the findings for other cases will not be entirely different from the ones I have found for the Kurdish nationalist movement in its relation to Turkey. And on the other side of the political spectrum, how have majority nationalists operated in this respect? Have Serbian nationalists, for

example, tried to gain access to EU institutions through the emerging right-wing parties of member states to argue their case against Kosovo's independence? And if they have, then how, and to what effect, and why so? Generally I think it is challenging to look into what transnational political activists might teach us about the ways in which EU relations, especially with prospective member-states, are developed and, following from that, the accession process negotiated.

Internationalization of the Kurdish cause

In the second part of the PhD I gathered three sub-studies that examine some of the current challenges and opportunities for the Kurdish nationalist movement in its efforts to internationalize its cause and transform 'home'. This focuses attention on the other end of this transnational spectrum, the Turkey based pro-Kurdish organizations. These range from the militant, primarily the PKK, along with its co- or sub-organizations (e.g. the KCK); through the main, PKK linked, Kurdish political party (now BDP); to a multitude of NGOs interested in the Southeast. As stated in the Introduction, a mapping project for the movement was, by conscious decision, not attempted, but some indication of the range of Turkey based NGOs I have found is perhaps relevant here.

The Turkey based NGOs relevant here are at the least minimally pro-Kurdish, supportive of human rights for Kurds and opposed to state (or other) denial of these, and thus peripherally attached to the nationalist movement, while at the other extreme they are unnervingly strident and highly active for the nationalist cause. The NGOs vary both in their closeness to or distance from the PKK, and also in their level of mobility and breadth of activities, both of which considerations bear on their position in the transnational movement. First, Turkey based NGO relations with the militant PKK vary from rejection to discomfort through implicit to fairly obvious support. Some, like the Southeast branches of Human Rights Association IHD appear to be politically aligned to the PKK, even though there is, of course, no stated relationship, while others appear to function entirely independently (e.g. Diyarbakır Bar Association). Equally, some of these NGOs, like Mazlumder, have a national reach, and not really more than that, while others, like IHD are active in Europe (independently or through INGOs, such as the FIDH). Concerned especially with human rights issues, Turkey based NGOs I have found to have contributed at all levels of the movement, from the ground up - in the provincial centers, in Diyarbakır and Ankara, and all the way to the rarified corridors of EU power. Their input has been vital in getting the Kurdish nationalist cause publicized in the country and abroad, and they have been instrumental, like the non-PKK affiliated Europe based associations, in accessing and sustaining the EU in support of homeland demands through the issue of human rights.

The first contribution to the second part of this dissertation (Chapter 4) describes how the EU backed initiatives by the Turkish government and its administration to institutionalize the protection of human rights have caused established non-governmental human rights associations to become subject to marginalization in relation to both the government and EU officials. This is particularly pertinent given that several of these NGOs are and have been the most active in scrutinizing the Turkish state (governments and administrative bodies, judiciary and security forces) over the violations of the rights of Kurdish citizens. On the one hand, the government's human rights body is establishing cooperation with state-friendly civil society organizations, that do not question Turkey's ongoing hegemonic security paradigm or '*regime sécuritaire*' (Dorronsoro, 2005); on the other, the European Commission supports this institutionalization process, criticizing established human rights associations for being too 'politicized'. This thus stands as an interesting case study of how the EU, contrary to a pre-accession negotiation phase open to the calls and concerns of human rights activists and their associations, has, during the accession negotiation process, become less welcoming and might even work against the interests of some of the associations of which it had previously been supportive, undermining the very human rights activists concerned with the plight of the Kurds who were such important contributors to the internationalization of the Kurdish issue in the initial efforts to effect EU policy-making (as testifies Chapter 2).

To my knowledge case-studies such as this one, which give insight into how EU-induced reform might play out and have unforeseen and even counterproductive outcomes, are rare. We might expect that in many instances where the top-down EU prompted reforms that are only half-heartedly undertaken by candidate states will have similar disappointing results. In the political realm, this consideration would be especially pertinent to those states where the state system – the various state political, administrative and security organizations and their leading individual figures – have a worrying record of past human rights violations. It is highly relevant to research similar cases in order to acknowledge how EU efforts meant to further EU principles (through the Criteria) – politically, to increase human rights protection, as well as strengthen democracy and state-society cooperation – can have outcomes that appear to undermine rather than support these goals, empowering certain stake holders at the cost of disempowering others. This stands as a sixth testable statement.

The above mentioned marginalization of (in particular Kurdish) human rights activists in Turkey, I have shown, relates to the designation of the Kurdistan Workers' Party as a terrorist organization, which has more generally complicated the defense of Kurdish demands internationally, and in particular the agenda of the Kurdish nationalist movement and its call for a politically negotiated solution to the armed conflict with the Turkish state. I have engaged with this problem at length in Chapter 5, arguing against the thesis that the PKK has turned against Turkey's accession to the European Union. Instead I tried to show the reasons for the growing distrust amongst PKK militants (and

sympathizers) in relation to the EU, at the same time arguing that actually their future support for Turkey's accession remains undecided, and is being made conditional upon their own recognition as a legitimate political actor in Turkey's domestic politics as well as in the international arena.

I have, therefore, paid particular attention to the ways in which the terrorist designation obstructs Kurdish diplomacy, not only for PKK militants acting as 'diplomats', but also for the representatives of the PKK-affiliated political party (now BDP). What is more, the terrorist designation disempowers the EU itself with regards to its means to criticize Turkey for its broad interpretations of its anti-terror laws, the restrictions of civil liberties, and other human rights violations committed in the name of safe-guarding national security. These in turn redirect Turkey away from the initiated democratization process its future EU-membership necessitates. Overall, the chapter should attest to the highly problematic nature of the terrorist listing, even though a critique of the listing itself was not the main goal of this chapter.

In terms of the lobbying work discussed in the first half of the thesis, the issue here does go beyond human rights, which reveals itself politically as the 'soft option': the ultimate test is indeed that of conflict resolution. Can the Kurdish nationalist movement succeed in persuading the EU to 'get its hands dirty' and engage directly in trying to end the armed conflict? Of course, while the conflict continues, final accession is put on indefinite hold, at best, which might not overly worry some. The obvious comparison here is with the case of Kosovo, in which a regional, nationalist movement represented by an armed organization (the Kosovo Liberation Army) was listed as a terrorist organization, then delisted and eventually supported by EU member states (following the US), where upon it was able to play a crucial role in the making of peace and initial establishment of regional autonomy. Kurdish nationalists would wish for a similar process in their own case. I argue, therefore, that the terrorist designation of the PKK is working against Turkey's bid for EU membership and de facto prolonging the armed conflict by not contributing to its resolution. These are two more statements which future (follow-up) research might support or otherwise. In general, there is a clear need for more research into the effects generated by (EU) terrorist designation of organizations with regards to conflict management and conflict resolution, and with regards to processes of democratization (in a EU accession context or not).

The final chapter of this dissertation does not relate as strongly to the EU accession negotiations as the other chapters, but it does tell us a lot about the possible future orientations of the Kurdish nationalist movement, regionally, nationally and internationally. In this chapter, I tried to argue how the integration of the Kurdish movement into the Global Justice Movement, and in particular the organization of its own local social forum, provides a means to internationalize its cause, but more importantly, serves as a means to affirm and display the alternative politics and society that the Kurdish movement – through its municipalities and civil society associations –

has been setting-up in the Southeast of Turkey. The rhetorical question is thus posed regarding the extent to which the Kurdish nationalist movement really is integrating itself into the Global Justice Movement, as opposed to (merely) appropriating its action repertoire and outlook. What is clear though is that the event of the Mesopotamia Social Forum provided a good looking glass through which to view the current ideological and organizational transformation of the Kurdish movement.

The MSF afforded interesting insights into the type of new goals the Kurdish nationalist movement might pursue, as well as the self-image it seeks to uphold within the national and international left. Regarding the first of these, the MSF represented an eastwards stance, suggestive of the subtle forces operating around the emphasis of structuration points (above). In respect of the movement's self-image, the MSF attests to its continued aspiration for a vanguard role in the political liberation of peoples. Indeed, one of the remaining questions regards the extent to which we are indeed witnessing ideologically induced (top-down) efforts for societal and political transformation, or, contrarily, an ideological (bottom-up) transformation flowing from the ongoing experience of local experiments in self-rule within the BDP run municipalities. What interaction has been and currently is at play here? And is the turn from state-oriented international activism to societal-oriented activism foremost a consequence of the ideological turn, or does it as much result from the great disappointment within the Kurdish movement with regards to the lack of international backing for their cause, as I described in the chapter on the terrorist designation of the PKK?

This latter consideration returns us to the EU role in Turkey's domestic politics. Continuing along this track, we might also ask how the engagement with the EU has contributed to ideological and organizational transformation of PKK and Kurdish nationalist party. It could be enlightening to understand how the Kurdish nationalist movement's engagement with the EU affects its political demands at home. From my reading of the current events, and in particular from what I have discussed in the final chapter, I maintain that we will only be able to understand the logic of the future transnational political activities of the Kurdish nationalist movement by continuing to keep abreast of the ideological and organizational changes inside of it (in relation, of course, to the changing domestic and international environment).

With regard to the ideological turn, the post-nationalist card that is now being drawn by Turkey's Kurdish nationalist movement is one of the most fascinating dimensions of this subject. Highlighted by the PKK leader through his 'prison writings', a thorough transformation and institutionalization process has been ongoing for a decade now. The pledge for a post-national politics and society comes as something of a contradiction, in particular for those observing the local developments and seeing a proto-state in the making, with the new policies of Kurdification of territory and people that sustain this. Even calls and municipal initiatives to respect the multicultural reality of the Southeast (such as described in Chapter 3) contribute to the imaginary of the Kurdish nation, that

is, as defined in contrast to the homogeneity sought by the founders of Turkish nationalism and adherents to Turkish nationalist nation-building over the past century (termed 'Kemalists'). Thus even apparent multiculturalism might be announcing the development of a new monoculturalism.

The Kurdish movement's leadership – and its followers – seek to undertake a project of 'civilization' that conceives of itself as a break away from the modern civilization projects of the 20th Century because of its postmodern critique of the currently installed neoliberal nation-states. Its project remains a highly ideological and idealistic one, therefore, aiming, moreover, at a radical transformation not only of state and society, but also of the individual, who is to turn him/herself into a 'new man/woman', an ideal embodied by the PKK guerrilla fighters. In that sense, the Kurdish nationalist movement's ideology might not be so very different from the totalitarian projects it seeks to escape from. How these socio-political changes, particular inside the PKK, play out in localities where Kurdish citizens reside, and the ways in which militants and sympathizers (inside the BDP and the associations) need to accommodate their ideological convictions to the local needs, constitute interesting subjects for future research in the Kurdish regions. Related to this, it will be interesting to see what kind of frictions might develop in the future between activists who have been living in exile for long years and those based primarily in Turkey, but engaged in transnational political activities (and thus probably more socialized into the movement's new perspectives).

Indeed, the reading of the different articles of this PhD bring up many interesting questions and orientations for future research on both the Kurdish movement and other transnational political organizations, along with EU integration and transnationalism studies more generally. It would equally be valuable to see more attention being devoted to the importance of transnationalism for the current make-up of Turkey as a whole, and not merely with regards to its Kurdish question. We might question the extent to which Turkey's sovereignty over its own politics is even still thinkable at all with all its transnational dimensions in today's globalized realities. Specifically, for example, we might think of the country's domestic political sphere (with its different political parties being organized abroad amongst Turkish constituents in countries of settlement, such as the widespread perception of 'green money' [international Islamicist funding] being at the root of the rise to power of the AKP); its international relations (the government's juggling act between, for example, its position in NATO and popular anti-American sentiment – c.f. in recent years, abstaining from the Iraq war, a leading role in Afghanistan, and now taking an anti-Israeli line); its economic ties (in the era of open market neo-liberalism, obviously, but also in respect of the political ramifications of informal networks of trading relations in the EU with its huge populations of 'Euro-Turks', and the Middle East, with its huge oil wealth); and the internal influence of its quasi-religious networks (with the transnationally organized and still growing Fetullah Gülen movement, perceived to be in a fairly advanced stage in the process of constructing an alternative 'deep state' [*derin devlet*] to the traditional Kemalist one).

And, of course, it is and will continue to be the work of many academics to assess the weight of the EU on the political and social changes inside Turkey, which brings me to some concluding thoughts about Turkey's future.

Future Prospects

I would like to conclude this PhD by engaging with 1) possible prospects for Turkey's accession negotiations with the EU, and 2) the Kurdish issue. At the time of writing my proposal for this PhD it was late 2005, early 2006, and there was still a great deal of enthusiasm about Turkey's bid for EU membership amongst those in support of its accession. Both in political and academic circles, Turkey was applauded for the many legislative reforms it had introduced in the run-up to the EU's decision in favor of the opening of the accession negotiations. Not only was Turkey applauded, but in particular the ruling AKP that had come to power in 2002 was welcomed by Turkey-supporters in Europe and the United States. A 'moderate' and 'democratic' Islamist party in the Middle East was strongly welcomed by the West following the, at that time still recent, events of September 11, 2001 and the perceived threat of rising Islamic fundamentalism worldwide. However, over the course of my four years of research the atmosphere has changed. In particular with the election in Europe of politically conservative parties to power (such as Angela Merkel's German CDU election triumph in 2005, and the election of Nicolas Sarkozy to French President in 2007), and a more general rise in conservatism and Islamophobia, the support for Turkey's candidacy began to crumble. Equally, inside Turkey the reform process slowed down and stagnated, in part due to the domestic judicial and political struggle between the old and the new political power centers (AKP versus the secularist establishment). Some of those who had been initially supportive of the AKP inside Turkey, such as the intellectual liberals in academia and journalism, also started to move through skepticism to profound criticism with regards to the AKPs democratic credentials.

As explained in Chapter 5 and also addressed in the appended background papers, the Kurdish nationalist movement had experienced a particular set of problems inside Turkey and internationally. At home the Kurdish nationalist movement felt the increased strength of the AKP, both in numerical terms given the number of Kurdish votes for the ruling party, as well as in political terms, as the AKP had become the defining actor in the 'solution to the Kurdish question', both at home and abroad (in relation to the EU that is). This was enforced with the terrorist designation of the PKK by the EU, which virtually removed its international credibility and sharply undermined support given to the PKK affiliated political party and the PKK inspired associational life, posing a real challenge for those within these organizations attempting to have their voices heard beyond the borders of Turkey, and underwriting Ankara's curtailing of their activities and socio-political integration in Turkey.

During my period of research, however, the Kurdish nationalist movement has been able to embed itself politically in the (internal) political arena. At the local level, its councils have become bolder in their challenge to the state hegemony; nationally, its party re-entered parliament in 2007; and in the region as a whole, it recovered its primacy over the AKP following state action against the PKK (military cross-border operations in Iraq), (Appendix 2) – which was confirmed in 2010 when the ‘Kurdish provinces’ of the Southeast supported the nationalist party (BDP) against the government (AKP) by abstaining from participating in the nationwide referendum on a government proposed new constitution (to reform the military constitution still in place from 1982). It was in this political space that the AKP has attempted to address the Kurdish issue in toto, or appeared to want to. The atmosphere inside the country is radically altered now, and yet still the state restrictions continue and the root problems remain largely unaddressed (Appendixes 1 and 2).

Because of the recent developments in Turkey and Europe, my initial optimism for Turkey’s accession has turned into pessimism. I have grown ever more doubtful of Turkey’s ever becoming a fully accepted member state of the European Union. However, I do believe that the citizens of Turkey, and in particular Kurdish citizens, do and will benefit from keeping the accession negotiations open. As long as the negotiations continue, the EU can continue to function as a watchdog over Turkey’s domestic affairs and urge Turkey to reform. This is most important for those groups that continue to face problems in channeling their demands into Turkish politics and therefore are still depending on transnational political networking and lobbying to find means to reflect their demands back to Turkey. For Turkey to continue on the reform path, however, clear signals that they ‘might’ be allowed to integrate into the European Union, and continuing support from a number of member states will be necessary in order to keep alive a minimum degree of Euro-optimism against the rising tide of skepticism amongst Turkey’s lawmakers and citizens alike.

It is clear that the European Union has not been willing to take up a more active role in mediating a resolution of Turkey’s Kurdish question and the armed conflict that is part of it. On the contrary, the terrorist listing has obstructed any possibility of a serious EU involvement in Turkey’s handling this matter. However, even in a scenario of continuing accession negotiations and in case Turkey would, encouraged and steered by the EU, seriously engage with more reforms that would allow for its democratization, this still would not guarantee a solid and durable solution for its Kurdish question. Democratization in and of itself does not end an almost thirty year old armed conflict, nor does it lead to the political and societal integration of the militants and guerillas of the PKK, or of the followers, parties and associations of the Kurdish nationalist movement as a whole. Surely a less politicized judiciary, a stronger parliament, a less-censored press and a depoliticized military under full civilian-oversight would contribute greatly to a climate in which open discussion with the involved parties will become possible. However, it is also, I would argue, significantly *because* Turkey has not

seriously faced the Kurdish question that it continues to remain a semi-democratic regime.

The fight against 'terrorism' in Turkey has (1) served the military in retaining its powerful position ('safeguarding the country's sovereignty' and homeland security and thus maintaining the '*regime sécuritaire*' (Dorronsoro, 2005)); (2) been invoked on numerous occasions during judicial prosecutions of speeches and writings deemed to be 'in support of terrorism' (or separatism), leading to the temporary, but repeated closure of legal outlets for the Kurdish movement, such as news papers and political parties; (3) hampered serious political dialogue and negotiations with the PKK or its legal representatives of the DTP/BDP, not the least because it could end in political suicide for those politicians or political parties that would be conceived as 'surrendering to the terrorists'. Even the extravagant electoral threshold of 10% remains 'off the table' as its reduction would, currently, lose the governing AKP 50 – 80 parliamentary seats (to the Kurdish BDP).

Considering all this, a resolution to Turkey's Kurdish question is an inherent part of Turkey's democratization process, and not the automatic result of it. Thus the two need to go hand in hand, with continued EU input, and maybe resulting in full EU membership, or a special partnership. If, on the contrary, there is a lack of progress in the years to come and real political stagnation, this will most probably translate in tandem to rising Turkish nationalist and Kurdish nationalist demands, making it ever more difficult for those who want to broker peace to find a solution within the existing borders of the country.

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Appendixes

Background papers on the developments inside Turkey

Appendix 1

“Road Maps” and Roadblocks in Turkey’s Southeast

Marlies Casier, Andy Hilton and Joost Jongerden

Published October 30, 2009, Middle East Report Online

“Whether you call it a terror problem, a southeastern Anatolia problem or a Kurdish problem, this is the first question for Turkey,” Abdullah Gül declared in May. “It has to be solved.” With these words from the president, Turkey’s ruling Justice and Development Party (known by its Turkish acronym, the AKP) put the long-simmering tensions between the state and the country’s millions of Kurds squarely on the front burner. Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdoğan then announced a major new initiative, whose Turkish title literally translates as the “Kurdish opening.” Soon after that, the imprisoned leader of the Kurdistan Workers’ Party (PKK), Abdullah Öcalan, announced that he had completed a “road map to peace,” 160 handwritten pages proposing means to the end of the fighting between PKK guerrillas and the Turkish army, an on-again, off-again, decades-long war that neither side is strong enough to win or weak enough to lose. Hopes for a definitive answer to Turkey’s “first question” rose high, but few concrete steps were taken.

Several months later, in an attempt to force a breakthrough, Öcalan said that delegations of Kurds should return to Turkey as “peace groups” from their camps in northern Iraq. Two groups crossed the border on October 18. The biggest, numbering 26 people (including nine women and four children), was from the refugee town of Makhmour. A second group of eight guerrillas came down from a PKK base in the Iraqi Kurdish Qandil mountains. In the late 1990s, tens of similar returnees were arrested, tried and imprisoned for seven to 15 years, but this time most members of the “peace groups” were merely detained overnight before being released, following negotiations between the state and a team of 45 lawyers. Five of the guerrillas face prosecution for membership in a terrorist organization and spreading terrorist propaganda.¹²⁴

A joyous crowd of 50,000, including ten MPs from the pro-Kurdish Democratic Society Party (DTP), greeted the freed “peace groups” on the Turkish side of the remote, but busy border crossing. Accompanied by the DTP, the returnees traveled in a convoy to Diyarbakır, the unofficial capital of Turkey’s Kurdish-dominated southeast, where more than 100,000 people came out to welcome them. Then a third group of Kurds, due to arrive in Istanbul from Europe on October 28, found its entry visas withheld at the last

¹²⁴ *Zaman*, October 19, 2009.

instant by the Turkish embassy in Brussels. The celebrations had proven too provocative for the Turkish side, which perceived them as a victory parade. Erdoğan suspended the peace group project, blaming the DTP for putting the whole initiative at risk of going back to square one. Once again, it seemed that much had been promised, but little delivered.

Great Expectations

The AKP's springtime "opening" had initially spoken of such measures as cessation of restrictions on use of the Kurdish language, better prison conditions for Öcalan and return to Turkey for the PKK fighters on the condition that they lay down their arms. By early August, however, the *Vatan* newspaper was reporting on much broader government plans, something like an overall strategy that would see it following the path lit by another "road map" prepared by the independent think tank, TESEV, and requested by the prime minister's office a few months previously. This document had laid out the basics of "diverse efforts" to "solve the entire Kurdish question," recalling (or warning) that "the state's failure to pursue policies during non-violent periods in favor of restoring permanent peace caused it to miss very important opportunities."

Economically, TESEV called on the state to invest in infrastructure and pursue full employment in the historically poor southeast, among other measures. Political and legal recommendations included writing a new constitution compliant with international human rights norms and establishing Kurdish-language education and public services. The latter step has been unimaginable for the Turkish nation-state since its foundation under Mustafa Kemal Atatürk in the 1920s. (The state has so insisted upon the Turkishness of the polity that Kurds were long described as "mountain Turks.") Regarding security, TESEV recommendations included disbanding the village guards, the Kurdish units recruited and armed by the state to battle the PKK alongside the army. Another issue that needed to be addressed was the plight of the million-plus people forcibly evacuated from their villages in the southeast by the army in the 1990s, and never resettled, let alone compensated.¹²⁵

The government's springtime announcement of a new initiative was not the first time that the comments of politicians in Ankara had raised expectations. In 1991, Prime Minister Süleyman Demirel stated flatly, "Turkey has recognized the Kurdish reality." Two years later, Demirel's successor Tansu Çiller spoke of the "Basque model," referring to the partial autonomy for Basques obtaining in Spain. And in 1999, as Turkey geared up for its campaign to join the European Union, Prime Minister Mesut Yılmaz avowed, "The road to the EU passes through Diyarbakır." None of these hopeful signs came to anything, however, as politicians continued largely to kow-tow to the military. In his first term as prime minister, Erdoğan made similar noises, pledging in August 2005 to

¹²⁵ Yılmaz Ensaroğlu and Dilek Kurban, *A Road Map for a Solution to the Kurdish Question: Policy Proposals from the Region for the Government* (Istanbul: TESEV, 2008).

resolve the Kurdish question by building a “democratic republic,” and telling Diyarbakır crowds later that year, “The Kurdish problem is my problem.”¹²⁶

It appeared that the Islamist-oriented AKP just might make good on the promises of its secular predecessors. As outsiders, the AKP had a somewhat different overall agenda from the Kemalist establishment. It derived great electoral support from the Kurds when it first swept into power in 2002, and was locked in a bitter struggle for power with the military dating to the “post-modern coup” of 1997, in which the army had deposed an Islamist government without firing a shot. Nevertheless, in the late autumn of 2007, the AKP gave in to army pressure and green-lighted cross-border raids on PKK bases in northern Iraq. The raids were triggered by renewed PKK attacks on Turkish soldiers, as the group ended its unilateral ceasefire explaining that there had been no reciprocation from the Turkish side.

As Turkish and Kurdish nationalist feelings sharpened again, militant voices grew louder in the national debate. It did not escape Kurds’ attention that some of the most outspoken AKP figures on the Kurdish question had fallen silent. In fact, the only real opening before the spring of 2009 was the establishment of the state satellite TV channel TRT 6 in January. Broadcasting in all three main Kurdish dialects, the new channel came under the direction of Sinan İlhan, a Kurd from the Foreign Ministry who commented openly on state suppression of civil liberties and the “pointless bans” on the Kurdish language.¹²⁷ This move might have appeared to represent a major shift in state policy, had it not been for the timing. TRT 6 was put together in just 45 days and then launched less than three months before provincial elections in the southeast, in which the AKP aimed to defeat the DTP. The channel was dismissed as a campaign stunt. The DTP won the elections in the southeast.

It was clear from this result that Kurdish voters would not be appeased by relatively minor measures like a single state TV channel, and had started to lose hope that the government would try to address their aspirations to greater cultural and political autonomy, let alone engineer an end to the armed conflict. And, given that Erdoğan proclaimed the Kurdish initiative against this background, cynics understandably assumed the “opening” to be no more sincere than many other measures undertaken by the AKP. Notably, the party had enacted democratic reform in order to meet EU accession criteria and then forgotten about it once the EU had pronounced itself satisfied. The “opening,” it appeared, was little more than a series of photo opportunities.

¹²⁶ Cited in Burhanettin Duran, “The Justice and Development Party’s ‘New Politics,’” in Ümit Cizre, ed., *Secular and Islamic Politics in Turkey: The Making of the Justice and Development Party* (New York: Routledge, 2008), p. 97.

¹²⁷ *Today’s Zaman*, January 5, 2009.

And yet, from the date of Gül's statements of late May, barely a day passed without the Kurdish issue front and center in the Turkish media. Intellectuals reflected upon France's experience with devolution of the central state, and newspaper columnists analyzed paired concepts like "nation-state" and "unitary state," "Turk" and "Turkish," and "supra-identity" and "sub-identity." Polling on the issue was commissioned and reported, and the Kurdish question in general became a prominent topic on talk shows and in newspapers.

In mid-August, the prime minister made an emotional appeal for all parties to unite behind a solution, rhetorically asking parliamentarians, "If Turkey had not spent its energy, budget, peace and young people on [fighting] terrorism, if Turkey had not spent the last 25 years in conflict, where would we be today?"¹²⁸ Optimism rose with the summer temperatures. Clashes between the PKK and Turkish army were few, with the PKK again adhering -- officially -- to a unilateral truce. On the political front, DTP leader Ahmet Türk floated a vague four-point plan, and Interior Affairs Minister Beşir Atalay held consultations with the major parties, unions and business associations. But still it remained far from clear if the AKP really had a complete package in mind, let alone what it would look like.

Öcalan's Road Map to Peace

Meanwhile, Abdullah Öcalan sent word from jail that on August 15, the twenty-fifth anniversary of the Kurdish insurgency, he would release a comprehensive peace proposal. His lawyers were unable to receive the 160-page "road map" until August 20, however, whereupon the prison authorities confiscated it. The whereabouts and fate of this tome remain uncertain. Because Öcalan's intention to release the road map had been widely known, many saw the entire AKP initiative as propelled by the desire to preempt him. Deniz Baykal, leader of the main opposition Republican Peoples' Party, even accused the government of acting on a timetable set from İmralı, the island prison where Öcalan is held.

The contents of the mislaid road map have emerged, however, in reasonable detail. The PKK line is that the road map follows the "defenses" raised by Öcalan during his trial and appeals between 1999 and 2004, in which he propounded a concept of "radical democracy." This idea is expressed in two parallel projects. The first, a top-down reform of the Turkish state into a "democratic republic," aims to decouple democracy from ethno-nationalism, by which citizens' rights are tied to their Turkishness, and substitute a civic understanding. The second, democratic confederalism, envisions that Kurds will gain some form of autonomy through bottom-up, local self-organization.

Öcalan and the PKK stress that the guerrillas are willing to lay down their arms for good in favor of political dialogue. Indeed, the PKK has called several ceasefires prior to the

¹²⁸ *Today's Zaman*, August 12, 2009.

one currently in effect, the first in 1993 and the longest for over five years between 1999 and 2004. The PKK's quest for political dialogue has a similar history. Before the first ceasefire, there were indirect contacts between Öcalan and Turgut Özal, then the president, while regular contacts between state representatives and the PKK occurred in 2006-2007 (as detailed in a book published by the state's National Intelligence Organization) -- the failure of which led to the most recent round of violence.¹²⁹ Just as in Northern Ireland, where the British met secretly with the Irish Republican Army for years while vowing that they would never "negotiate with terrorists," so also it seems the state in Turkey has had occasion to pursue a clandestine pragmatism.

Despite pressure from its militants to show "strength" in the absence of a positive response from Turkey, the PKK again declared unilateral ceasefires in 2008 and 2009, holding open the door to negotiations while using the break in fighting to reorganize itself, in line with the dictum reiterated by a DTP adviser, "Always be ready for peace, or for war." This delicate balance within the PKK has been maintained to date, with the organization standing behind Öcalan's road map, irrespective of its content, and thus displaying an enduring loyalty that continues to prevent Ankara from taking the imprisoned leader out of the equation.

"Project for National Unity"

The end of August proved to be a turning point. First, harsh criticism of the AKP poured forth from the parliamentary opposition, replete with dire warnings of the impending downfall of the republic. This invective was followed by a message from the chief of general staff, İlker Başbuğ, posted on the army's website, which reiterated the military's commitment to the "unitary" Turkish state and the struggle against terrorism. The top general rebuffed the DTP call upon the government to negotiate with Öcalan, saying, "There should be a good look at who is responsible for the bloodshed. You cannot put martyrs who sacrificed their souls for their country and terrorists in the same corner." In response to the push for political and cultural autonomy for Kurds, Başbuğ continued, "The state of Turkey, the country and the nation, is an indivisible whole. Its language is Turkish."¹³⁰

The summer was ending, the weather turned unseasonably cool and the Kurdish opening began to close. President Gül lashed out at journalists who asked about amnesty for PKK militants. Prime Minister Erdoğan, attending an *iftar* meal (to break the daily Ramadan fast) with police at a Special Operations Department branch, declared, "I say this very clearly and openly: Neither the state nor the government of the Republic of Turkey will sit down with terrorists or treat a terrorist organization as a party to

¹²⁹ *PKK/Kongra-Gel Terör Örgütü: Analiz Notları, Mücadele Metodları* [The PKK/Kongra-Gel Terror Organization: Analytic Notes and Combat Methods] (Ankara: Emniyet Genel Müdürlüğü İstihbarat Daire Başkanlığı, 2008).

¹³⁰ *Yeni Şafak*, August 26, 2009.

negotiations. This can never, ever be a subject for discussion.”¹³¹ On September 5, prominent AKP MPs turned a discussion of the Kurdish opening into a recitation of old slogans, denouncing the PKK as “baby killers” and exalting Turkey as “one nation with one flag.”¹³² And CNN Turk showed Erdoğan stating at another *iftar* meal, “If we execute a project for national unity, if we make steps toward a democratic opening, we do it with the aim of ending terror.” The discursive shift was sharp. It was only in May that the new initiative had been proposed, and already, by the first week of September, it had been converted into a “project of national unity” and the Kurdish question reduced, once more, to a single word, “terror.”

All this signaled an early retreat from the loud pledges to strive for a lasting peace, as recognized by Ahmet Türk, quoted in the newspaper *Radikal*: “The mountain did not even give birth to a mouse.” Then Muammer Türker, governor of the southeastern province of Hakkari, an AKP appointee with a record of liberal statements on the Kurdish question, warned that should the government fail to meet expectations, Kurdish separatist feeling and the risk of further bloodshed would rise in tandem. Aware of the danger of getting bogged down again in insults and recriminations, Öcalan called on both Turkey and the PKK to cool down the rhetoric. Over the next two months, the state emitted more positive noises. Reports surfaced of a high-level meeting between Erdoğan and the military to discuss wide-ranging proposals including conditions for PKK amnesty, employment for disbanded village guards units and Kurdish-language education at the junior level.¹³³ Again, however, what materialized was nothing much -- initial preparations for private “foreign-language” TV channels and a few university courses in Kurdish studies.

In fact, the “Kurdish opening” had by now become entrenched as the “democratic opening” -- a phrase implying redress of the grievances of other marginalized groups like the Laz of the Black Sea region and Turks of Bosnian origin.¹³⁴ But this Orwellian redefinition was to mutate further, with the major initiatives directed outward, and the “opening” reinterpreted in terms of thawing Turkey’s frozen relations with its eastern neighbors, Armenia and Syria. And thus it was that Öcalan intervened to try to push matters forward with the peace groups.

Whereas Öcalan and the PKK considered this action promotion of his road map, and the peace groups were intended to negotiate actively for PKK demands, the public shows of support for the returnees clearly embarrassed the Turkish authorities. The future of such peace groups is unclear. On the one hand, their suspension might not be temporary, while on the other hand they may yet be able to negotiate with the authorities, and could even eventually operate as the thin end of the wedge for a piecemeal, undeclared

¹³¹ *Güncel Haber*, September 3, 2009.

¹³² *Istanbul Haber*, September 5, 2009.

¹³³ *HaberTürk*, September 16, 2009.

¹³⁴ *Radikal*, September 18, 2009.

amnesty. What is certain, however, is that the delegations have served both the PKK and the DTP, allowing them openly to test the sincerity of the government and to demonstrate their ongoing popularity, primarily to their constituents and to the state, but also to the world at large.

Looking West and East

The European Union and the United States have been calling upon the PKK to disarm unconditionally since the events of September 11, 2001. Mainstream nationalist Turkish politicians and the public at large, predisposed to see a geopolitical agenda hidden in the helping hand of the West, have been unconvinced. When US weapons infiltrated from Iraq were discovered in PKK arsenals in the summer of 2007, and various US politicians spoke in support of a federal or partitioned Iraq with its Kurdistan nearly or wholly independent, these nationalists had all the proof they needed of Washington's "true" intentions. Many Kurds, meanwhile, intrinsically distrust Washington because of its close ties to the Turkish state, including its supply of weaponry, intelligence and counter-insurgency training to Ankara.

The US is of course very much involved in the future of the northern Middle East, particularly given its ongoing military presence in neighboring Iraq. Regional stability is paramount for the US under President Barack Obama, all the more so now that the US has to deal simultaneously with deteriorating security in Pakistan and Afghanistan and difficulties with Iran. And with tension in northern Iraqi cities on the rise -- especially in the oil-rich center of Kirkuk -- Washington is worried about escalation. The US would prefer to see the armed conflict on the Turkish-Iraqi border resolved sooner than later. Nevertheless, one cannot imagine Washington investing political capital on behalf of the Kurds in the way that it did for the Irish, attractive as parallels with Northern Ireland might be.¹³⁵

As for the EU, its call on the PKK to renounce violence has shown Kurds that the days when their émigré populations could rally Europe to their cause are over. The Kurdish issue is no longer a simple case of basic human rights, especially with the developing ties between Brussels and Ankara. The AKP realizes that it needs to show some signs of engagement with the Kurdish issue in order for EU accession negotiations to continue. But Turks, steeped in the history of the attempted Anglo-French carve-up of the Ottoman Empire at Sèvres in 1920, have not yet forgotten the numerous visits of European parliamentarians to the southeast over the years. In the end, the promise of EU membership exerts little leverage on the country these days, after referenda in France and Germany showed such stark opposition to Turkey's bid to join the club. If

¹³⁵ On the example of Northern Ireland, see Zafer Yörük, "Lessons to Be Learnt from Northern Ireland," *Bianet.org*, August 19-20, 2009; and Ted Smyth, "The Unsung Heroes of the Irish Peace Process," *World Policy Journal* 22/1 (Spring 2005).

Ankara is paying lip service to real democratization and peace in the southeast to mollify Brussels, that does not bother Turks who believe that Europe is only stringing Turkey along anyway.

The PKK itself gives scant credence to the Western call to disarm, because, in the absence of trust in genuine dialogue, it considers the military option necessary for the survival of the Kurdish struggle. It is a terrible truth that it was PKK killing that brought the Kurdish issue to the fore in the first place -- just as it was IRA bombings that ultimately led to reform in Ulster. European politicians find it hard to comprehend why the guerrillas have not come down from the mountains, and in the fervor of the "global war on terror" they were swung to Turkey's position. There is, indeed, a collective amnesia about armed conflict and how it can be resolved. In Europe, the upshot is to devote the most attention to Kurdish cultural rights, at the expense of the Kurds' political demands and the need to create a climate conducive to negotiations. The EU has pulled back from playing the crucial role that, for example, the US played in legitimizing the IRA.

Looking east, Iraqi Kurdish leaders seek to improve their relationship with the Turkish government and ensure the prosperity and security of their territory. Indeed, the suggestion has surfaced in the Turkish media that Iraqi Kurds might prefer to be linked to Ankara than to Baghdad. Masoud Barzani, president of the Kurdistan Regional Government (KRG) in northern Iraq, has long been criticized by Turkish authorities for allowing the PKK to maintain bases there, and in March 2009, Iraqi President Jalal Talabani called upon the PKK to lay down its arms following bilateral meetings with Gül and Erdoğan. The KRG went on to voice guarded support for the Kurdish opening and urge the PKK to maintain its ceasefire. "Any positive initiative on the issue is appreciated by us," said Falah Mustafa Bakir, the KRG equivalent of a foreign minister. "We will make sure that our territories will not be used as a launch pad for attacks against our neighbors."¹³⁶

Although there are economic incentives for Turkey to improve its relationships with the Iraqi Kurdish leadership, neither the KRG nor Talabani is strong enough to broker peace. It was Öcalan who summoned the peace groups that entered Turkey from KRG-administered lands, and it remains unclear if Barzani or Talabani played any role at all. To the contrary, their full-fledged support for the AKP government initiative -- despite (or maybe precisely because of) its disregard for the main political actor speaking for the Kurds of Turkey -- suggests that they are bystanders.

Prospects

Winter approaches. The immediate prospects do not look good. The apparent closure of the opening bolsters radical Kurdish nationalists in their view that it is near impossible

¹³⁶ *Today's Zaman*, August 17, 2009

to resolve the conflict peacefully. The rapid collapse of the political space for compromise deepens PKK's and Kurdish suspicions of the Turkish state. Hopes rose high with the entry and the subsequent release of the "peace groups." But given the halt called by the prime minister, and the snail's pace of progress on the core issues the PKK began fighting for in the first place, disillusionment is setting in once more. The scattered PKK attacks on Turkish soldiers in the summer and fall, meanwhile, proved to Turkish nationalists that the opening is best shut, permanently. The DTP, isolated in Parliament since the 2007 election, and heavily criticized for its popular mobilization following the entry of the peace groups, is shackled.

The AKP, assuming it intends to create momentum for peace anew, will find this task difficult. Even though the governing party enjoys considerable EU support, it will again encounter resistance from the parliamentary opposition, as well as the armed forces, who have accused the AKP of surrendering to "the terrorists." What is more, a large part of the AKP's constituency comes from the nationalist mainstream and is unsupportive of expansive overtures to the Kurds. The party leadership, beginning to look ahead to the 2011 elections, is already loath to rock the boat.

In 2009, the phrase of the moment was "road map" -- whether in the TESEV report or Öcalan's shelved opus. Deniz Baykal invoked the phrase sardonically to distance his party from the Kurdish opening, bidding the AKP, "*Bon voyage!*" The problem, though, is that the Turkish government appears to have been without a road map. Its journey has accordingly seemed meandering, its leaders driving blind. A slightly different metaphor, however, of peace as a process, does seem to describe events as they have transpired. Erdoğan might still be prevaricating when he claims the "democratic opening" is a seven-year work in progress with short-, medium- and long-term objectives.¹³⁷ But this concept does offer some hope, a glass with something in it, even if it is far from half-full. And Erdoğan is not wrong to emphasize how much progress has been made.

The metaphor of a "peace process" recalls the unfolding narrative from the north of the island of Ireland. To be sure, there are important differences. First, although there are undeniable tensions, the ethnic groups of Turkey are not in the grip of the strong communal enmity that characterized relations between the Protestants and Catholics in Ulster. The problem in Turkey is primarily a political one, a problem of the Turkish state's own making, in the construction of a nationalist ideology for the country. That is the good news. The bad news is that Northern Ireland emerged as a beacon from the darkness of "the Troubles" because the investment of British nationalism in the province was relatively small, to the degree that London was eventually able to act as honest broker between the minority Sinn Féin and the majority Ulster Unionists. In Turkey, however, it is the state itself that represents the oppressive majority. The AKP may well be the only potential honest broker for another generation.

¹³⁷ *HaberTürk*, September 17, 2009.

The AKP gained power by winning the middle ground of Turkish politics, but the center can be an awkward place to occupy. Steering a middle course may mean being all things to all people. Playing off competing groups and ideologies against each other as oppositions come and go -- the army vs. the EU, secularists vs. Islamists, Kemalism vs. liberalism -- means also being defined by them. The AKP is faced with the choice of whether or not to take a stand and set a principled course of its own. The summer and autumn of 2009, alas, were probably not the prelude to this principled course. Rather than a Northern Ireland-style Good Friday Agreement, progress on the Kurdish question in Turkey will continue to be characterized by small, painful steps rather than major breakthroughs. DTP representatives will get reelected, Kurdish speakers will be employed in the Diyarbakır police force and private Kurdish-language TV channels will finally start broadcasting. And the deeper, underlying political problem will go unaddressed. A revised constitution is the next major, achievable target, in 2010 possibly, though more likely sometime in the year or two following a 2011 AKP election victory. But Kurds and Turks will wait in vain for a truth and reconciliation commission to apply balm to the wounds of warfare in the 1990s and subsequent skirmishes. Recep Tayyip Erdoğan is probably no John Hume, but he is certainly no Nelson Mandela.

Fruitless Attempts? The Kurdish Initiative and containment of the Kurdish nationalist movement in Turkey¹³⁸

Marlies Casier, Joost Jongerden & Nick Walker

Abstract

Since the victory of the Kurdish party in Turkey's southeastern provinces in the local elections of March 2009, Turkey has witnessed the AKP government's Kurdish initiative, the closure of the Kurdish party and waves of arrests and investigations into Kurdish activists and politicians. What we are witnessing are renewed efforts to contain and roll-back the political and societal influence of the Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK) in Turkey's, which responded with a temporary suspension of its self-declared ceasefire resulting in another round of violence and deaths. But what is it exactly the government and the state seek to contain? This article intends to increase our understanding of the political institutionalization of the PKK inside Turkey, including the role of its main front organization, the KCK, and show, thereby, how the current Turkish state and government attempts seem bound to fail.

Introduction

Towards the end of its second term in power, the ruling AKP in Turkey is currently engaged in pushing through a raft of major constitutional changes supposedly aimed at further democratization - an effort, however, unsupported by the main Kurdish party, the BDP. Following the controversial court ruling that banned the BDP's predecessor, the DTP - a move that seemed to undermine the government's attempt to deal with the Kurdish problem - the AKP included in its planned amendments to the Turkish constitution measures to bring the judiciary more closely under the control of the executive. Secularist fears about the real intent of the government in this respect are clear - the judiciary, one of the bastions of anti-islamist republicanism (Kemalism), is

¹³⁸ This article is under review with the international peer-reviewed A1-journal *New Perspectives on Turkey*. It is a follow-up article to the article above published in MERIP Online.

now under attack. For Kurds, however, the balance of power between the various institutionalized state functions is of less relevance than the lack of concessions to the Kurdish cause planned for the new constitution. And this plays out against the recent background of government and state actions that are analyzed in respect of the central power-play in Turkey today: the ongoing battle for control of the state in relation to the struggle for definition of the state's Kurdish policy: judiciary repression of hard-line Kemalists versus political reforms of the AKP government. Both, however, should be placed within context of recent BDP-PKK attempts to develop structures for self-government at the local and regional level.

On the December 24, 2009 the Diyarbakır Chief Prosecutor's Office began an operation which resulted in the arrest of some 80 people, mainly party officials and representatives of the pro-Kurdish Peace and Democracy Party (*Barış ve Demokrasi Partisi*, BDP), successor to the Democratic Society Party (*Demokratik Toplum Partisi*, DTP), and including nine present or former mayors.¹³⁹ A few weeks later, in mid-February 2010, another round of arrests took place, taking into custody tens of executive members of the BDP. These were not the first arrests to hit the DTP-BDP. An earlier wave back in April 2009, two weeks after the DTP success in the local elections (essentially, it won the southeast back from the AKP), had resulted in the detention of 110 people from over 20 cities (mainly DTP officials).¹⁴⁰ According to the indictments, the detainees of the April, December and February operations were all members of the Turkey Council of the Kurdistan Democratic Confederation (*Koma Civaken Kurdistan*, KCK), an organization associated with the Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK) – the people arrested, that is, were thought to be running municipalities under the direction of the PKK, internationally regarded as a terrorist organization. June 18, 2010 the prosecutors of Diyarbakır would ultimately charge 151 Kurdish politicians and activists from the southeast with aiding the PKK.¹⁴¹

In May 2009, shortly after the first round of arrests, President Gül, had made a public statement naming the Kurdish issue as the most pressing problem in the country. This was followed by Prime Minister Erdoğan's announcement of a new initiative, a 'Kurdish opening' (*Kürt açılım*). In mid-August, Erdoğan made an emotional appeal for all parties to unite behind a solution to the Kurdish question, rhetorically asking parliamentarians, "If Turkey had not spent its energy, budget, peace and young people on [fighting] terrorism, if Turkey had not spent the last 25 years in conflict, where would we be

¹³⁹ The mayors of Batman, Siirt, Cizre, Diyarbakır-Kayapınar, Diyarbakır-Sur, Çınar, Viranşehir and Kızıltepe, and the former mayor of Diğle.

¹⁴⁰ "Operation that shocked DTP", *internethaber* (online) April 14, 2009, accessed May 10, 2010, http://www.internethaber.com/news_detail.php?id=187881, and İhsan Bal, "The Intraparty Clash of Pro-Kurdish DTP." *USAK articles-analyses* (online), May 7, 2009, accessed January 11, 2010, <http://www.usak.org.tr/EN/makale.asp?id=964>

¹⁴¹ Aliza Marcus, "Troubles in Turkey's Backyard", *Foreign Policy*, July 12, 2010, accessed August 20, 2010, http://www.foreignpolicy.com/articles/2010/07/09/troubles_in_turkey_s_backyard

today?"¹⁴² Confronted with harsh criticism from opposition parties and state institutions, however, in the Fall the AKP rephrased its opening as a project of national unity, a 'democratic' inclusion of (some) other minorities and minority rights within the historically nationalist Turkish state system (and extended also to include a normalization and improvement of relations with the country's eastern neighbors). Nevertheless, the party had made it clear that it was searching for a new way of defining the Kurdish issue, challenging the old framing by the PKK and its affiliates in terms of colonization and occupation, and by the state in terms of social and economic backwardness.

The main thesis of this article is that the developments in Turkey since the elections of March 2009 testify to different attempts to contain and roll-back the political and societal influence of the Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK) in the southeastern provinces. Alarmed by the election outcome, the ruling party and state officials responded in two ways. The first was the upsurge in judicial investigations and arrests of activists deemed to be PKK members, in order to crack down on its urban wings. Indeed, as Henry Barkey attested recently: "The Turkish State is aware of the political aspect to the Kurdish issue and is doing everything to contain the growing political challenge".¹⁴³ The second was the government's launch of the Kurdish initiative, challenging the PKK and its affiliated organizations and the DTP both politically and ideologically. This paper will discuss both responses and the effects they are generating, as well as considering future prospects for the burning issue of the Kurds in Turkey. First, however attention will be devoted to understanding the issue, what it is exactly that the different responses are intended to confront. To this end, we begin by elaborating on the 2009 elections and the current political institutionalization of the PKK in the southeast of Turkey, and the role of its front organization, the KCK.

Background

2009 Election

The March 2009 local elections resulted in a clear victory for the DTP. This is important to emphasize, because its significance can easily be missed. The DTP success is not revealed by looking at the big picture: countrywide, the party was essentially static, stuck at an unimpressive five to six percent of the national vote.¹⁴⁴ Nor is the DTP

¹⁴² "Erdoğan make's emotional appeal for unity on Kurdish initiative", *Today's Zaman*, August 12, 2009.

¹⁴³ Henry J. Barkey, "Turkey's silent crisis", *Foreign Policy*, August 31, 2010, accessed September 1, 2010. http://www.foreignpolicy.com/articles/2010/08/31/Turkey_s_silent_crisis

¹⁴⁴ E.g. 'Kurds in Turkey number approximately 15 million, and 25% of this population voted for the DTP. That is to say, most of the votes of the Kurdish population went to the AKP and to the other parties', as quoted from Ihsan Bal, "The Kurdish Issue: Today and Its Future. The Democratic Initiative and the DTP's Capacity to Use This Channel", *USAK articles-analyses (online)*, January 11, 2010, accessed March 24, 2010. <http://www.usak.org.tr/EN/makale.asp?id=1288>

success shown very well by looking at statistics for the regions as defined by the state: for example, the Turkish Statistical Institute (*Türkiye İstatistik Kurumu*, TÜİK) records the AKP as the biggest party in every one of the country's ten regions, while focusing on the East Region and the Southeast Region still shows the ruling party with the most city mayors (nine) and can give the impression of an even divide (the DTP gained eight city mayors). Rather, attention needs to be directed to the DTP performance itself, because it is that which was defined by the Kurdish area of Turkey's southeast and which thus defines the region today.

Building on its success in the 2007 national election, when it was able to get 21 MPs into parliament, the DTP achieved a huge increase in its control of local government in 2009 as compared to the previous (2004) local elections. In terms of total (city and district) mayorships, for example, it made a relative gain of over 60 per cent, nearly doubling its 2004 vote in several provinces,¹⁴⁵ and winning back support that had previously gone over to the AKP. Nevertheless, this could have been palmed off in terms of the natural rhythm of election cycles, for example, or popular politicians or even good service provision (these were local elections after all). It would have meant little politically without the main prize, Diyarbakır.

The 'unofficial capital' of Turkey's Kurdish region, metropolitan Diyarbakır was publicly targeted by the AKP during the election campaign. The stakes were high as Prime Minister Erdoğan vowed to take the city and the DTP mayor responded by claiming it as their 'fortress'. In the end, Diyarbakır not only stayed with the DTP, but emphatically so. Presenting what turned out to be a DTP landslide as a victory for the idealistic young over the pragmatic older generation – some 15 per cent of the city's electorate were first time voters – online English sister newspaper to the popular mainstream *Hürriyet* headlined this 'striking result' under the banner 'Pro-Kurdish DTP sweeps Diyarbakır'.¹⁴⁶

And yet, crucial as it was, the election in Diyarbakır was still pretty much the same as all the others in the region. Basically, third parties were squeezed out in a two horse race. Rival claims were made by the two principle protagonists in what became a referendum to determine who represented the people's 'real' interests, the AKP stressing practical economics and conservative (Islamic) values, and the DTP a regionally politicized ethno-nationalist (Kurdish) identity. It is at the level of the local assemblies, therefore, that the true picture of the territory and its people emerges, away from the specificities of the main city and the various politics of personality that characterize the race to be mayor. Here, in the general councils, the DTP became the main party in ten provinces (as opposed to five in 2004). It won the popular vote across a large part of the southeastern corner of Turkey. In broad terms, this draws the map of Kurdish Turkey today. Equally noteworthy therefore, is the *strength* as well as breadth of support: in very high turnouts

¹⁴⁵ The provinces of Bingöl, Ağrı, Diyarbakır, Hakkari, Mardin, Muş, Şırnak and Van.

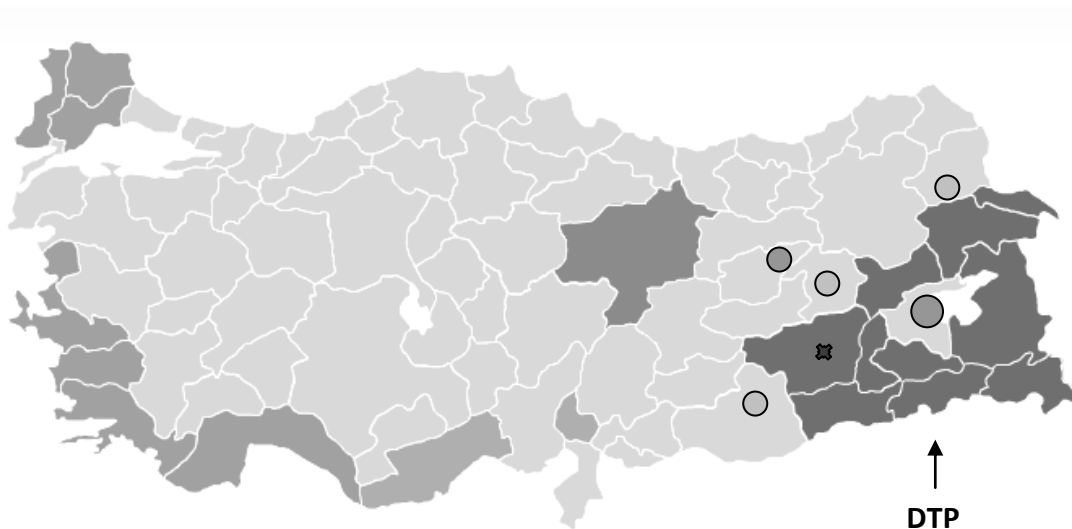
¹⁴⁶ <http://www.hurriyet.com.tr/english/domestic/11318806.asp>;
<http://en.timeturk.com/dtp-multiplies-votes-in-southeastern-provinces--17729-haberi.html>

(70-85 per cent), the DTP polled almost half of all votes cast in the provinces it won, for the top five percentage votes in the whole country¹⁴⁷.

Placing this back into the national context, Ali Çarkoğlu notes that “the DTP emerged as the most successful party in attracting... votes at the expense of the AKP at the provincial level” –while the DTP won ten provinces, the Republican People’s Party (*Cumhuriyet Halk Partisi*, CHP) were only able to take seven. Çarkoğlu assesses the 2009 results in terms of the two ‘electoral regions, or provincial clusters’ where the AKP had suffered its first electoral reversal of fortunes to date (the other being the country’s relatively affluent western coastal strip, taken by the CHP), and analyzes the dynamic in the southeast thus: “[T]he rise of the ethnic Kurdish vote seems to have diverted support from the AKP. [...] The reason for the declining support of the AKP was most likely the ethnic identity issues... The military operations that followed the AKP’s electoral success in the region in the July 2007 elections [incursions into Iraq mostly, against the PKK] appear to have tilted the electoral balance in favor of the DTP.”¹⁴⁸

The Kurdish area in Turkey: Provincial authorities after 2009 local election results

Map: Turkey, showing region of DTP majority provincial authorities *



* Circles indicate AKP provinces with DTP at 15 – 30%. ✖ – Diyarbakır
(Light shaded provinces, AKP; other darker shaded provinces, CHP, MHP and BBP.)

¹⁴⁷ In Hakkari, the DTP achieved the highest share of the popular vote (74%) for any province in Turkey, in Sırnak the second highest, Diyarbakır 3rd, and Batman 5th, accessed August 10, 2010. <http://secim2009.ntvmsnbc.com/default.htm> ;

Turkish Statistical Institute, “Local government elections”, Accessed July 5, 2010.

<http://www.tuik.gov.tr/secimdagitimapp/yerel.zul>

¹⁴⁸ Ali Çarkoğlu, “Turkey’s Local Elections of 2009: Winners and Losers”, *Insight Turkey*, 11 (2009): 1-18.

Table: Percentage vote by province (inc. change of vote share from 2004, & margin of victory) *

PROVINCE	DTP		AKP		Victory Margin***
	Vote	Change**	Vote	Change	
Hakkari	74	+28	21	-12	54
Sirnak	61	+23	31	+6	30
Diyarbakır	59	+16	32	-1	28
Batman	53	+3	35	+18	18
Van	48	+22	34	-6	14
Mardin	44	+17	27	+4	17
Muş	43	+13	29	-3	14
Ağır	37	not given	29	-6	8
Siirt	37	+11	35	-3	2
Iğdir	32	not given	23	-1	10
AVERAGE****	48%	(17)	29%	- 1	19%
Bitlis	27	+12	32	+3	5
Tunceli	20	+2	27	+10	7
Kars	18	not given	37	-2	19
Şanlıurfa	20	not given	40	0	20
Bingöl	21*****	0	43	0	22

* Selection criteria: provinces in which the DTP recorded >15% of the vote.

** DTP figures calculated on proviso that it entered the 2004 as the major partner of a six-party coalition.

*** Some victory margin figures appear inconsistent as an affect of roundings.

**** Averages for DTP majority provinces (above the row)

***** In Bingöl, the DTP came third, fractionally (0.1%) behind the Islamic Felicity Party (*Saadet Partisi*).

(Sources: secim2009.ntvmsnbc.com [with wikimedia] & Çarkoğlu, 2009 – using TÜİT figures)

Processes of institutionalization

Though large parts of the southeast had been under the ideological influence of the PKK since the end of the 1980s¹⁴⁹ – and for part of that time even controlled by its guerilla – it was only following the municipal elections of April 1999, when HADEP won 6 provinces in the southeast and obtained 37 mayors,¹⁵⁰ that the movement became legally institutionalized at the local level. Successive pro-Kurdish political parties close to the PKK (HADEP, DEHAP and DTP, now BDP, each opened as its predecessor was closed by the state) steadily increased their power up to the present (notwithstanding some municipalities lost to the AKP in 2004 as the ruling party reached its popular zenith, to be regained in 2009). This growing strength of legitimate, albeit continuously

¹⁴⁹ Ismet Imset, *The PKK. A Report on Separatist Violence in Turkey (1973-1992)* (Ankara: Turkish Daily News Publications, 1992); David Romano, *The Kurdish Nationalist Movement: Opportunity, Mobilization and Identity* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006); Joost Jongerden, *The Settlement Issue in Turkey and the Kurds. An Analysis of Spatial Policies, Modernity and War* (Leiden and Boston: Brill Publishers, 2007).

¹⁵⁰ Turkish Statistical Institute, op.cit.

de-legitimized, political power was reinforced with the local development of a Kurdish civil society, also drawing both inspiration and human resources from the PKK. In the municipalities, strong relationships and cooperation have been fostered between the party officials, their administrations and the DTP/BDP-friendly NGOs and local entrepreneurs, giving shape to tight knots of local power-sharing through which relationships with the Kurdish constituencies have been developed.

Even though the municipalities have suffered from bureaucratic obstacles imposed upon them since the start by the central state institutions and had far more difficulty in attracting certain types of subsidies and investment than municipalities under the ruling AKP, they have nevertheless managed to develop what Watts terms local political 'micro-climates'.¹⁵¹ According to Watts, these micro-climates are characterized by first, a blurring of the relationship between state and non-state actors (between the municipalities and the local professional associations, unions, NGOs, etc), and second, the changing nature of social resistance that is becoming more and more institutionalized through the municipality-steered activities. These localized socio-political networks of cooperation reinforce the power of the municipalities and the Kurdish movement more generally, as they enable – through service delivery and an engagement with a diverse repertoire of symbolic politics – a reaching out to the local constituents and development of ties of reciprocity and loyalty.¹⁵²

These regional developments did not go unnoticed by state officials and the governing party. The AKP has also sought to increase its votes amongst the Kurds in the southeast and has been developing equally exclusive networks of cooperation with the local civil society actors in the municipalities under its own ruling (and over a similar time span). Unlike the AKP, however, the DTP and its organizational network has not enjoyed state patronage. On the contrary, it has engaged in contentious politics and been subject to state pressure. Over the past ten years the Turkish judiciary has launched literally hundreds of investigations into the activities and speeches of the local Kurdist actors.¹⁵³ Nevertheless, notwithstanding the constructive local political work of the AKP, the administrative and economic hindrance from Ankara, and the downright destructive force of the state legal-security apparatus, the pro-Kurdish party was overwhelmingly vindicated by the electorate in 2009. And thus it was that the judicial investigations

¹⁵¹ Nicole F. Watts, "Re-considering State-Society Dynamics in Turkey's Kurdish Southeast", *European Journal of Turkish Studies*, 10 (2009). <http://ejts.revues.org/index4196.html> and Nicole F. Watts, "The Missing Moderate: Legitimacy Resources and pro-Kurdish Party Politics in Turkey", in *The Kurdish Policy Imperative*, ed. Richard Lowe and Gareth Stansfield (London: Chatham House, 2010).

¹⁵² Nicole F. Watts, "Activists in Office: Pro-Kurdish Contentious Politics in Turkey", *Ethnopolitics*, 5 (2006): 125-144.; Sebnem Aslan, "Incoherent State: The Controversy over Kurdish Naming in Turkey", *European Journal of Turkish Studies*, 10 (2009). <http://ejts.revues.org/index4142.html>; Joost Jongerden, "Crafting Space, Making People: The Spatial Design of Nation in Modern Turkey", *European Journal of Turkish Studies* 10 (2009). <http://ejts.revues.org/index4014.html>; Clemence Scalbert-Yücel, "The Invention of a Tradition: Diyarbakır's Dengbêj Project", *European Journal of Turkish Studies*, 10 (2009). <http://ejts.revues.org/index4055.html>

¹⁵³ Watts, "The Missing Moderate"

result in the two waves of arrests mentioned, with large numbers of associations and party offices raided and people taken into custody for investigation into their alleged ties with the KCK. The spring 2009 arrests after the DTP election success were followed by those of December of 2009, around the same time that the DTP was closed-down by Turkey's Constitutional Court, for its alleged separatism and relationship with the PKK – these following shortly after a highly publicized show of mass public support for a small group of PKK fighters and families returning from camps in Iraq, which was partially organized through the DTP/KCK.

The government's stuttering Kurdish initiative, along with the arrests made and party closure enacted during its development, and together with the whole history of judiciary investigations and arrests, needs to be understood in the light of the local developments described. The legitimate development of pro-Kurdish power is considered a threat to the central state and its control over the Kurdish region. Ultimately, this becomes a struggle over sovereignty. The crack-down on the KCK has been carried out in order to obstruct the continuation of the PKK's socio-political institutionalization in Turkey's southeast.

The role of the KCK

Founded in 2005 (as the *Koma Komalen Kurdistan*, KKK), The KCK was constructed according to the principle of bottom-up self-organization. As such, it can be considered a popular-front organization emerging from and working with people at street, neighborhood and village levels. The KCK is active in several spheres of public life. It has a legal committee, which is involved in the establishment of 'people's courts', a committee for civil society organizations, implementing projects to activate civil society, and a language and education committee, responsible for implementing projects to develop the use of Kurdish as a written language. Operative primarily at local level, the KCK does of course have higher (city, provincial and regional) levels of organization also. For this it has a decision making council, composed of representatives from the different parts of the Kurdistan area (Turkey, Iraq, Syria and Iran) and the Kurdish Diaspora in western Europe.¹⁵⁴ It was of membership of the Turkey Council of the KCK that the people arrested in the spring and winter of 2009 were accused.¹⁵⁵

Ideologically, the KCK is inspired by the vision of the imprisoned PKK leader, Abdullah Öcalan. An important concept in the KCK is the 'free citizen' (*özgür yurttaş*). The free citizen concept includes basic civil liberties, such as the freedom of speech and organization, but also freedom of ethnic, religious, cultural and linguistic identity, and

¹⁵⁴ Koma Komalen Kurdistan Sozlesmesi, "Kongre Belgeleri Dizisi IV (Congress Papers Series IV)", *Wesanen Serxwebun* (Serxwebun Publishers, 2005).

¹⁵⁵ "Güneydoğu gözaltıları aydınlanıyor: Operasyon DTP'ye değil KCK'ya (The southeast arrests explained: Operation against the KCK not DTP)", *Zaman*, April 14, 2009.

the freedom to develop a cultural and national identity.¹⁵⁶ The KCK is also considered to be the architect of the free municipality model (*özgür belediyeçilik modeli*), adopted by the DTP at a three day conference in February 2008, which aims to realize a bottom-up participative administrative body, from local to provincial levels.¹⁵⁷ The KCK and free municipality model are both to be understood in terms of the 'democratic triangle' concept developed by Öcalan. Outlined from his island jail through his lawyers, Öcalan's democratic triangle is intended to function as a 'strategic dispositive,' the institutional and ideological capability, that is, to orient and organize Kurdish political demands (and thereby hoped to resolve the problem in Turkey's southeast). According to the ideology, the democratic triangle should be composed of three interrelated projects: the democratic republic, democratic autonomy and democratic confederalism.¹⁵⁸

The project for a democratic republic refers to Turkey, aiming at the establishment of a new reformed republic with equal rights for all citizens. It is in the context of this project that the drafting of a new constitution became a tangible political demand on the part of the Kurdish movement. In the constitution of the Republic of Turkey, citizenship has been equated with Turkishness, historically making Kurds invisible.¹⁵⁹ A new constitution, it follows, has to define citizenship in civil terms. While the project of the democratic republic centers upon individual rights, the project of democratic autonomy focuses on the collective rights of the population. Öcalan considers both cultural and religious rights as forms of such collective rights. Democratic confederalism, finally, is a project for local self-organization. Referring among others to Murray Bookchin, this democratic confederalism is referred to as an alternative project of democratization, one which is organized bottom-up, from the local level.¹⁶⁰ It was this 'democratic triangle' which implied that political and ideological struggle be given priority over armed conflict, developments affirmed in 2009 through one of the main PKK militant-activist magazines, '*Serxwebun*'.

Fuelled, among other things, by Turkey's desire to become member of the European Union and the requirements to reform attendant upon this, public discussion on individual and collective rights has flourished during the past decade. The drafting of a new constitution has become a vigorously debated issue over the past two years, ultimately leading to the organization of the September 12, 2010 referendum, and the issue of cultural rights was to be a corner stone of the government's Kurdish opening (see below). For the PKK, however, it is democratic confederalism that has been the key-

¹⁵⁶ Koma Komalen Kurdistan Sozlesmesi, "Kongre Belgeleri Dizisi IV (Congress Papers Series IV)".

¹⁵⁷ "DTP'de hedef 100 belediye. Accessed July 10, 2010. <http://www.aktuelbakis.com/Politika/6656.html>

¹⁵⁸ Ahmet Hamdi Akkaya and Joost Jongerden, "The PKK in the 2000s: Continuity through breaks?", in *Nationalisms and politics in Turkey: political Islam, Kemalism and the Kurdish issue*, ed. Marlies Casier and Joost Jongerden (London/New York: Routledge, 2011).

¹⁵⁹ Henry Barkey and Graham E. Fuller, *Turkey's Kurdish Question* (Lanham/Oxford: Rowman Littlefield Publishers, 1998): 10-11. Even now the number of Kurds in Turkey is disputed, primarily because the state still does not gather official statistics for ethnicity (e.g. through the regular national census).

¹⁶⁰ Mustafa Karasu, *Radikal Demokrasi* (Wesanen Mezopotamya Neuss, 2009).

project, envisaging as it does not only a grand program for a societal configuration beyond the nation-state, but also a clear project for local organization. The recent waves of arrests are aimed at preventing further implementation of these kind of concepts and projects, by taking down the KCK.

Various publications, commentators and organizations have made a direct link between the KCK arrests in April and December and the success of the DTP in the local elections earlier that year – such as the pro-AKP Zaman newspaper and the independent but state-oriented and politically well-connected Ankara think tank, the International Strategic Research Organization (*Uluslararası Stratejik Arastirmalar Kurumu*, USAK). According to Zaman, the KCK was decisive in the DTP success.¹⁶¹ How important the KCK really has been for the pro-Kurdish party remains to be seen, as this kind of analysis tends to underestimate the organizational dynamics of the political party itself, assuming an overly high level of control over the party on the part of the KCK/PKK. In fact, the legal Kurdish political party (under whatever name) has always been an organizationally distinct body from the KCK/PKK, attracting independent individuals alongside loyal PKK followers.¹⁶² This said, however, it is a well-known fact that the Kurdish nationalist movement is indeed very influential within Kurdish politics and Kurdish associational life.

A more refined approach observes the distinction between the legal and illegal Kurdish parties. In fact, the recent arrests have used this as a starting point. Aiming to take the KCK out of political life, this approach effectively amounts to an attempt to remove the PKK from the legal party in an equation that reads something like ‘DTP – KCK (PKK) = BDP’. But how practical is this as a strategic policy? It does not really hold with the experiences of those of us researching and visiting the region on a regular basis, who find that many people have indeed been socialized in the Kurdish movement: most are sympathizers, many are civil activists and some fulltime militants. In fact, there seem to be very few people in the Kurdish heartland who do not have any connections to friends or relatives that are or have been active in the movement or have been called to the mountains in order to join the armed guerilla. This makes more meaningful the words of Diyarbakır (Kayapınar) mayor Zülküf Karatekin and their testimony to the continuing influence of the PKK in the region, regardless of the fact of whether one is or is not actually a member as such of the KCK or any other organ of the PKK: ‘All Diyarbakır is KCK. You will not be able to finish the job by detaining me. You need to detain all the people of Diyarbakır’.¹⁶³

¹⁶¹ “Taraf ve Zaman’a ağır suçlama (Taraf and Zaman blamed)”, December 12, 2009, accessed July 10, 2010. <http://www.porttakal.com/haber-taraf-ve-zaman-a-agir-suclama-577850.html>

¹⁶² Watts, “The Missing Moderate”.

¹⁶³ Reportedly shouted when being submitted to the court health check, “Anti-PKK operations lead to detention of Kurdish mayors”, *Today’s Zaman*, December 25, 2009, accessed August 19, 2010. <http://www.todayszaman.com/tz-web/news-196573-anti-pkk-operations-lead-to-detention-of-kurdish-mayors.html>.

The government response: the Kurdish opening

Some analyses have the current democratic initiative as dating back a decade and tied to the EU process, which is reasonable but a little ingenuous.¹⁶⁴ What actually happened, as explained, was that the government embarked on its Kurdish opening after the DTP local election success but then drew back in the face of opposition and diluted it instead to a 'democratic' one more palatable to the Turkish nationalist orientation of the country's political center of gravity. The current Kurdish initiative, therefore, is more like an ad hoc process of politicking than a considered culmination of years of preparation. The best AKP revisionist apology has the initiative going back to comments by Erdoğan supportive of the Kurdish cause in Diyarbakır, 2005. But the very fact that these were not followed up until two years later, after the DTP election victory, rather gives the lie to that.

Quite what the Kurdish initiative was intended to come down to remained unclear, leading to discussions over whether or not there actually was a clear package or plan.¹⁶⁵ Thus it is still not really apparent if the government has an explicit strategy, or quite where the Kurdish opening announced fits into this. Tellingly, for example, Bal refers to the democratic initiative both in the past, as though finished, as one of a series of initiatives, and as ongoing.¹⁶⁶ This fudging does, of course, give support to the Kurdish nationalist claim to be determining the political discourse, with the AKP primarily as reactive – which would be no shame in a genuinely pluralistic democracy able to embrace an internal ethno-nationalist cause, but is not something the AKP appears willing or able to accept (see below). In order to understand the government initiative without the luxury of a clear-cut policy document, therefore, we need to draw inferences and generalize from the process as it has emerged over the last year or so. What seems apparent from this, it may be concluded, is that measures were to be promoted towards an ending of the restrictions on the use of the Kurdish language a revival of economic investment in the region through the longstanding GAP project, and the surrender of PKK fighters. These basic aspects of the original Kurdish initiative continue, it seems, into the ongoing democratic initiative.

The prime objective of the AKP government in the Kurdish part of its democratic initiative is to combat the PKK at the ideological level. Recognizing that there is 'a Kurdish issue' and promising to change some of the conditions that have given rise to it has been a huge step forward for the country. The AKP initiative, however, represents an attempt to define this issue on its own terms and thus set its own agenda for a solution.

¹⁶⁴ Bal, "The Intraparty Clash of Pro-Kurdish DTP".

¹⁶⁵ See for example Marlies Casier, Andy Hilton and Joost Jongerden, "Road Maps" and Roadblocks in Turkey's Southeast", *Middle East Report Online*, October 30, 2009, August 20, 2010). <http://www.merip.org/mero/mero103009.html>; differing from Cengiz Çandar, "The Kurdish Question: The Reasons and Fortunes of the 'Opening'", *Insight Turkey*, 11 (2009): 13-19.

¹⁶⁶ Bal, "The Intraparty Clash of Pro-Kurdish DTP".

The government acknowledges the Kurds as a distinct ethnicity, but harbors it under the roof of Turkishness. This republican concept, supposedly devoid of ethnic reference, operates as an umbrella for the ethnic diversity of the country.¹⁶⁷ Of course the concept of Turkishness is very far from ethnically neutral. Turkey has an official history taught in schools, for example, which basically begins in middle Asia, ancestral home of the Turks – school children in Turkey do not grow up learning that Kurds were in eastern Anatolia long before Turks ever crossed the mountains.¹⁶⁸

Just as the current approach arguably does little more than liberalize discussion within the confines of the old discourse, so also does it assume the other construct of the twin identity on which the modern Turkish nation is founded, inherited from the Ottoman Empire and employed in the initial construction of the state. Implicit in the AKP approach is the idea of a common citizenry based on religion. Turks and Kurds are united through Islam. Again, the old discourse is invoked – reference is typically to ‘our Kurdish brothers’ (*Kürt kardeşlerimiz*) – although the AKP has a good reason (its alleged anti-secularism) not to over-play this. The PKK, for its part, has more to lose than to gain from a radical questioning of religious identity (even to the extent that it is so motivated), so the issue goes largely unobserved. In fact, religion may be regarded as an elephant in the room of the AKP approach to Kurdishness. The AKP does not share the Kemalist myopic frustration with its Kurdish brethren for their apparent unwillingness to participate in the progressive expression of a secular Islam, but rather seeks common ground through an empathetic understanding of their reluctance – but on religious grounds.

Finally, like previous governments, the current administration is also trying to address the Kurdish issue through economic investment, intended to tackle the region’s deprivation and thereby drain the breeding ground of ‘terrorism’. While the AKP-led public recognition of the Kurdish language and culture can be regarded as a new development, and association through the shared faith as old as the republic and the empire before that, the economic perspective has been tied specifically to undermining the PKK. Since the government of Tansu Çiller at least, in the early 1990s when the Turkish state started to respond seriously to the military and political situation in the southeast over which it was rapidly losing control, a concerted, if fractured, attempt has been made to deal with the problem at source, perceived as socio-economic. Financial investment – in the massive GAP project of dams for hydroelectricity and irrigation – it is imagined, will cut off the supply of young fighters to the PKK, put simply, by giving them jobs. Youngsters without a material stake in society, a region without prospects of prosperity, these are considered to be the lifeblood of the PKK. Through the use of

¹⁶⁷ For a defense of this concept by academics in Turkey, see Metin Heper, *The State and the Kurds in Turkey. The question of assimilation* (Basingstoke/New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007).

¹⁶⁸ On the Turkish imagined past, see e.g. Ferhat Kentel, “Nationalist’ reconstructions in the light of disappearing borders”, in *Nationalisms and Politics in Turkey: political Islam, Kemalism and the Kurdish issue* ed. Marlies Casier and Joost Jongerden (Londen/New York; Routledge, 2011).

economic 'soft power' also, therefore, the AKP seeks to tackle the Kurdish issue and win back the hearts and minds (and votes) of Kurds.

AKP vs the Kurdish nationalist movement (PKK/KCK/DTP-BDP)

The Kurdish initiative has been undertaken with a conscious disregard of the social and political presence of the PKK. It is true that the government faces fierce opposition to the idea of negotiation with the PKK, the 'code' of staying in power which has meant avoiding conflict with the secular bloc led by the military and the judiciary.¹⁶⁹ In terms of *realpolitik*, the AKP has relatively little to gain from what is the side issue of the southeast in comparison to its real struggle – against the entrenched interests of the Kemalist 'deep state' (which translated itself in the political mobilization for the 12 September 2010 referendum over the new constitution). It makes political sense for the AKP to fight this battle on its own terms (and definitely not to have them determined by the PKK). Thus, what has transpired over the last two years is AKP support of the military in its operations against the PKK at the same time as protracted judicial investigations and court cases into alleged coup plots ('Ergenekon' and 'Balyoz'), bringing the military to heel following the government's assertion of civil over military power as part of the EU accession process.¹⁷⁰

Nevertheless, these considerations are not sufficient to explain the AKP approach to the Kurdish question. The party has become so dominant in Turkish politics, occupying the vast center ground of moderate religious conservatism and commanding such a huge parliamentary majority that it not only had the power to instigate an initiative addressing the issue in the southeast, but also to go to quite radical lengths to solve it. With sufficient desire and political will, the government could have carried the country, Turks and Kurds, a very long way down the road to resolution. There are, in fact, other reasons why the government has lacked incentive, and which thus provide a fuller explanation of the current approach.

There has never been a cooperative relationship between the ruling party and the Kurdish nationalist movement – irrespective of calls both in Turkey and from the EU for the two to join forces in order to advance political change in the country. The reasons for the ongoing distrust are various. Of course, the AKP, with many Turkish nationalists

¹⁶⁹ Ümit Cizre, "The Emergence of the 'Government's Perspective' on the Kurdish issue", *Insight Turkey*, 11 (2009): 1-12.

¹⁷⁰ Military influence in government was reduced with the 2003 '7th reform package' altering the make-up and downgrading the role of the National Security Force (*Milli Güvenlik Kurulu*, MGK). During Spring 2010 military's biennial winter exercises were held for the first time in the history of the republic with neither the president nor the prime minister in attendance – exercises led by the commander of the 3rd Army, who is indicted in the Balyoz case. See Ümit Enginsoy, "Military Maneuvers held in absence of civilian leaders", *Hürriyet*, March 4, 2010. <http://www.hurriyetdailynews.com/n.php?n=military-maneuvers-held-in-absence-of-civilian-leaders-2010-03-04>.

among its number, has difficulties in coming to terms with the Kurdish issue. But on more than one front the AKP and the Kurdish nationalist movement are also direct competitors. Most obviously, in the southeast as well as in the western metropolises where many Kurds live, they both seek to obtain the votes of the same electorate and, over a similar period of time (the last decade), have employed fairly similar means to achieve this, as mentioned (the orientation to bottom-up organization, emphasis on local service provision and establishment of relationships between politicized civil society associations and party-friendly entrepreneurs on the one hand and the constituents on the other).

Interestingly, inevitably perhaps, and irrespective of the strong divergences, the competition between the two actors has also led to the incorporation of Kurdish nationalist figures into the AKP and devoted Kurdish Muslims into the DTP. In other words, the competing parties have also, in practice, modified each another – which, ironically perhaps, only increases animosity as each poaches from the other's natural membership (of course the power balance has been an unequal one, particularly since the AKP is much more able than the PKK/DTP to attract financial investment, leaving the latter having to fallback primarily on 'symbolic politics'.¹⁷¹) Also, both AKP and the PKK claim to be the directors of Turkish democratization and consequently determining the future resolution of the Kurdish question – the AKP from Ankara through the Kurdish initiative, the PKK from the southeast through the democratic triangle concept. Neither one would happily tolerate the other's claim for credit or usurpation of authority in democratic improvements. Undoubtedly this constitutes an obstacle for any kind of negotiations between these political actors.

Crucially important as this struggle for authority is in terms of practical politics, though, arguably even more fundamental is the difference in *how* the two sides wish to achieve political change. Both the Kurdish nationalist movement and the conservative Muslim democrats of the AKP seek to transform socio-political life by engaging in the transformation of the individual and society. A better society is sought through change at several levels, including the most intimate level of the lives of their supporters. However, whereas AKP supporters are called upon to meet their individual responsibilities as devote Muslims displaying piety, the PKK ultimately seeks change through the personal transformation of its followers to 'new men' or 'new women'.

'Born from the left', the Kurdish nationalist movement has conceived of itself from the outset as a modern and revolutionary force for change, intent on doing away with traditional structures of socio-political organization.¹⁷² The conservative AKP

¹⁷¹ E.g. Renaming places with new or old Kurdish names, Joost Jongerden, "Crafting Space, Making People: The Spatial Design of Nation in Modern Turkey", *European Journal of Turkish Studies*, 10 (2009). <http://ejts.revues.org/index4014.html>

¹⁷² Joost Jongerden & Ahmet H. Akkaya, "Born from the Left. The making of the PKK", in *Nationalisms and Politics in Turkey: political Islam, Kemalism and the Kurdish issue* ed. Marlies Casier and Joost Jongerden (London/New York: Routledge, 2011).

constitutes a threat to this transformational project. This goes to the heart of the very real gulf that exists between the competing forces, beyond differences of emphasis or orientation, or the power politics of a turf war. Very much like the secularist opposition of the CHP to the current trend in Turkey's social and political life, many Kurdish militants and activists consider the AKP to have a secret agenda, as planning to Islamify the Turkish republic. It is deeply suspicious of and opposed to the basic direction of cultural change in the country, and the socio-political direction in which the government is going. This includes, for example, a back-pedaling on the move towards gender equality in the country.

The women's rights agenda has become an important stake for the Kurdish movement. It bridges the Kurdish question and the ongoing patriarchal domination within family and society that characterizes the Kurdish region. Less than half the female population gets any education at all in the east/southeast generally, for example,¹⁷³ while Diyarbakır has the fourth highest recorded provincial incidence of honor killings in the country after Istanbul, İzmir and Ankara¹⁷⁴ (and in those cities the killings occur 'mainly... among migrants from the southeast'¹⁷⁵). The subject of women's rights is one that has been claimed by the AKP agenda also, but, like other government reforms in the European application period, its moves in this area are less than convincing. For example, several conferences have been held and projects initiated in support of women's rights, but over the last six years the AKP instituted government body for human rights has recorded a grand total of just nine claims of women's rights violations (IHB 2008a, 2010).¹⁷⁶ Meanwhile, a largely negative report on the women's rights situation in Turkey to the European Parliament specifically mentioned the east/southeast of the country in various contexts, such as honor killings and nonregistration of baby girls – and the need for safe houses.¹⁷⁷ And yet, a subsequent

¹⁷³ Hacettepe Üniversitesi Nüfus Etütleri Enstitüsü (HÜNEE), *Türkiye Nüfus ve Sağlık Araştırması 2008* (Turkey Population and Health Survey 2008) (Ankara: Hacettepe Üniversitesi Hastaneleri Basımevi, 2009).

¹⁷⁴ Human Rights Presidency, "2007 Honour Killings Report", (T.C. Başbakanlık İnsan Hakları Başkanlığı, 2008), Accessed August 23, 2010.

[http://www.ihb.gov.tr/ozel%20raporlar/3.a.TORE_VE_NAMUS.02_07_2008\[1\].doc](http://www.ihb.gov.tr/ozel%20raporlar/3.a.TORE_VE_NAMUS.02_07_2008[1].doc)

¹⁷⁵ US Dept. of State, "Human Rights Report: Turkey", 2008 Country Reports on Human Rights Practices (2008). Accessed July 10, 2010. <http://www.state.gov/g/drl/rls/hrrpt/2008/eur/119109.htm>

¹⁷⁶ IHB, "İnsan Hakları İhlal İddiası Başvurularına İlişkin Sayısal Veriler [Figures for Human Rights Violation Claims]" (Ankara: T.C. Başbakanlık İnsan Hakları Başkanlığı, 2008). Accessed July 10, 2010.

http://www.ihb.gov.tr/RAPORLAR/Istatistikler/insan_haklari_istatistikleri_2007.pdf

And IHB, '[Human Rights Bulletin], 1 2010 (T.C. Başbakanlık İnsan Hakları Başkanlığı, 2010), accessed July 10, 2010.

<http://www.ihb.gov.tr/RAPORLAR/Istatistikler/2009%20İnsan%20Hakları%20İstatistikleri.doc>

¹⁷⁷ European Parliament, "Report on women's role in social, economic and political life in Turkey", (2006/2214(INI); A6-0003/2007), Committee on Women's Rights and Gender Equality (reporter Emine Bozkurt). Accessed July 10, 2010. <http://www.europarl.europa.eu/sides/getDoc.do?pubRef=-//EP//NONSGML+REPORT+A6-2007-0003+0+DOC+PDF+V0//EN>.

state-sponsored project for shelter housing in eight cities failed to include the Kurdish area.¹⁷⁸

This contrasts rather sharply with the DTP/BDP approach to gender issues. Just looking at the party itself reveals this. The DTP was the only major political party to have set itself a quota of female parliamentary candidates (at 40 per cent), and all but met this in its parliamentary decision-making boards before the party closure (with 38 per cent female representation). In 2007, the number of female MPs achieved by the DTP reached an impressive 30 per cent of its total parliamentary representatives, while the AKP (and CHP) trailed far behind with less than 10 per cent.¹⁷⁹

The state's response: containment through counter-terrorism

The state institutions, still dominated by hard-line Kemalists, such as the public prosecutors, parts of the military and the higher echelons of civilian bureaucracy still perceive the problem primarily in terms of 'terrorism' and respond by means of 'hard politics'. Repressive measures such as party and association bans and arrests continue to be employed in response to what is still regarded as an existential threat to the republic. Just as PKK bases are attacked from the air and the ground, so are sympathetic and related organizations hampered, restricted and closed down. This is essentially an extension of the 'oxymoron of a military solution'.¹⁸⁰

According to the simple imperative of fighting terrorism, it considered to be in the interest of all the branches and bodies of the state to undermine the strength of the local Kurdish-party led municipalities. This has been visible in judicial decisions of late, and not only high profile ones like the banning of the DTP, but also local ones, such as the Diyarbakır court decision to ban one of the main associations lending support to the poor in the city. This association (*Sarmaşık Derneği*) was closed-down for failing to have the official status of an association working for the benefit of public welfare. The decision to close this DTP-related body affects some 15,000 of Diyarbakır's most needy citizens. This kind of judicial enforcement attests to state officials' efforts to undermine

¹⁷⁸ Human Rights Presidency, "2008 Turkey Human Rights Report (An Evaluation)", (Ankara: T.C. Başbakanlık İnsan Hakları Başkanlığı, 2009). Accessed July, 10, 2010.

<http://www.ihb.gov.tr/english/RAPORLAR/Turkey%20Human%20Rights%20Report%202008.pdf>.

¹⁷⁹ TÜSIAD/KAGIDER, "Türkiye'de Toplumsal Cinsiyet Eşitsizliği: Sorunlar, Öncelikler ve Çözüm Önerileri. Kadın-Erkek Eşitliğine Doğru Yürüyüş: Eğitim, Çalışma Yaşamı ve Siyaset" Raporunun Güncellemesi (Social Gender Equality in Turkey: Problems, Initiatives and Suggested Solutions. Towards Female-Male Equality: Education, Working Conditions and Politics' Report Update)", (TÜSIAD, KAGIDER, 2008). Accessed July 12, 2010.

<http://sogep.org.tr/dosyalar/200808021408126722.pdf>

¹⁸⁰ Cizre, 'The Emergence of the 'Government's Perspective' on the Kurdish issue'.

the functioning of the DTP(BDP)-run municipalities, especially given the importance of aid programs for the ruling political actors to win over the local population.¹⁸¹

In respect of the recent arrests, the security analysis has the KCK as a modernized urban expression of terrorism, clandestinely spreading fear through the region's local authorities, hospitals, universities and the like, a type of Mafioso protectionist racket dealing in politics. 'Terror expert' and USAK deputy director Prof. Dr. İhsan Bal is a prominent advocate of this view, one that sees the KCK as seeking to drive a wedge between the Kurdish people and the Turkish nation and thereby preventing the silent majority of ordinary, peaceable Kurds from being able to allow the AKP's democratic initiative to develop. His views are worth repeating at some length, since they bridge the government, security and (more 'liberal') Kemalist positions, giving good expression to the AKP / Turkish establishment view and contextualizing the perceived need for a counter-terrorist response:

The Democratic initiative dates back to the beginning of this millennium. Turkey's 9-10-year EU accession period laid the foundations for this initiative by helping Turkey to gain confidence and solve its historical problems. [...] The DTP was in Parliament for 2.5 years. In this time period, although they were given the chance to settle the problems with a mutual and democratic understanding, they answered this offer by saying... Öcalan was the person who must be communicated with. This led the Kurdish people to question whether the DTP cares about them or about Öcalan most. [...] Protests and violence started a month before the DTP's closure. These are reflections of the DTP being used as a tool of Öcalan and the PKK. [...] The EU also told the DTP to "speak on behalf of Kurds, not Öcalan." If they had followed this advice, which now applies to the BDP, they would still exist today. If the DTP [i.e. BDP] continues to act this way then it will lose its supporters [...]. For Turkey's well-being, the KCK should be followed closely and brought to justice. If this happens, Kurdish politics will catch its breath, and will contribute to democratization more creatively, inclusively, beneficially and moderately.¹⁸²

On points of fact, first, there has been no sign of the DTP-BDP losing support – on the contrary, after the DTP had been in Parliament for 1½ - 2 years, the Kurdish people gave the party the ringing endorsement of the local elections. It is true that the DTP has been criticized for being too dependent on Öcalan in its response to the AKP's opening, including by him – which has been interpreted as evidence of the legal party's

¹⁸¹ In the 2009 election, the AKP in Tunceli notoriously gave away free fridges and cookers – and won the province.

¹⁸² Bal, "The Intraparty Clash of Pro-Kurdish DTP", and "Terror expert Prof. Dr. İhsan Bal Explains Point Reached in the Struggle with Terror", *USAK Strategic Agenda* (online), December 21, 2009. Accessed April 20, 2010. <http://www.usakgundem.com/haber/47501/ter%C3%B6r-uzman%C4%B1-prof-dr-%C4%B0hsan-bal-ter%C3%B6rle-m%C3%BCcadelede-gelinen-noktay%C4%B1-anlatt%C4%B1.html>.

continuing lack of maturity in the political domain, in large part as a result of state policy.¹⁸³ Bal's response of suggesting that the BDP is at risk of losing its electoral base, however, is basically just an expression of the frustration felt by the establishment in not being able to sideline the PKK leader.

Second, the 'protests and violence' the month before the DTP closure were mostly related to the events surrounding the homecoming of the PKK group referred to, when the government's Kurdish initiative finally stalled. Actually, the violence consisted mostly of civil unrest in demonstrations in the southeast (typically with youngsters involved in running fights with police), and in Istanbul with some clashes and public minibuses burnt – disturbing incidents but clearly symptomatic, occurring in the context of the process at that time, and hardly the onset of a wave of terrorism justifying the judicial/security assault on the KCK. In fact, more widespread civil disturbances have occurred in Istanbul and in cities across the Kurdish region since the DTP closure, in February for example, on the eleventh anniversary of Öcalan's arrest. Such events are a testimony to the lack of progress and continuing tension that results.

The reference by Bal to the EU, meanwhile, shows the danger of the international community putting separatist insurgency oriented groups on terrorist lists, as this has the effect of facilitating a knee-jerk security response to the empowerment of such groups (e.g. through the DTP success) and any associated unrest ('protests and violence'). As Casier notes, by naming the PKK a terrorist group, the EU ultimately became culpable in the human rights abuses and closure of the DTP, legally enabled by the Turkish government's 2006 amendments stiffening the country's anti-terror law.¹⁸⁴ Furthermore, the recent waves of PKK/KONGRA-GEL related arrests in Europe (Italy, France and Belgium) are arguably far more threatening to the possibility of long term peace and a resolution of the Kurdish issue than the violent incidents to which Bal referred, as they take the EU even further away from the potentially decisive mediating role it could have.¹⁸⁵

Theoretically, it is difficult to square Bal's Turkish establishment view with that of Ali Çarkoğlu quoted above. If the KCK can only operate through intimidation, then how is it that the targeting of the PKK in Iraq could have brought out support for the DTP in the Kurdish region in such large numbers, as Çarkoğlu suggests? Surely the obvious, and contrary, conclusion is that when called upon to decide, as in an election, the majority of Kurds in the region will and did support the Kurdish nationalist cause, as represented by

¹⁸³ Çandar, "The Kurdish Question: The Reasons and Fortunes of the 'Opening'"

¹⁸⁴ Marlies Casier, "Designated Terrorists. The Kurdistan Workers' Party and its Struggle to (Re)gain Political Legitimacy", *Mediterranean Politics*, 15 (2010): 395-415.

¹⁸⁵ Lest we forget: in pre-9/11 days, when international terrorist lists had not become the norm, it was the effective rejection by Bill Clinton of the terrorist definition and simple proscription of the IRA employed by the British as the cornerstone of their approach to the troubles in Ulster (Northern Ireland) that allowed the Irish nationalists in from the political cold (through the political party, Sinn Féin) and made progress towards a peaceful resolution possible.

the pro-Kurdish party interlinked with the KCK and PKK (and if the KCK does engage in intimidation tactics, then accepting or despite, rather than because of this). The perception of division among Kurds between those supporting and those opposed to violent means must have some merit, of course, but it is clearly less fundamental than the popular support among Kurds for the Kurdish organized advocacy of Kurdish rights and the political agenda for this which has emerged (a non-separatist nationalism defined in resistance to the state establishment hegemony).

Mostly undertaken on a general terrorism rationale, the 2010 European arrests (including that of an ex-MP from the 1990s of the then Kurdish party DEP) also reveal the poverty of what appears at its most fundamental to be a divide-and-rule approach, that is, one based more on an attempt to split the Kurdish movement than real evidence for a division waiting to be exploited. Thus, while the PKK in Europe responded to the arrests with a call for action across the continent, in Turkey, in what can be understood as a response to Bal's warning issued in the direction of the BDP, the European security operation was met by a simple expression of solidarity from BDP leader Selahattin Demirtaş, regarding it as a continuation of the KCK operation in Turkey: 'Kurds are being made the subject of international deals. Kurds have never, throughout history, accepted this. It won't accepted today either.'¹⁸⁶

Even though KCK associated judicial interventions and arrests seriously undermine the government's Kurdish initiative, they do also serve both the ruling AKP, in competition for Kurdish votes and seeking to determine the resolution of the longstanding Kurdish issue, and state officials who would like to see the PKK's influence over the population and the growing Kurdish nationalism confined. The arrests have generally been portrayed as necessary in the struggle against PKK 'terrorism' (e.g. Bal, above), a policy that is sustained by the governing party and opposition parties, and the military and judiciary. The main concern is to 'take away the root causes of terrorism,' but the current containment politics also attest to the growing recognition that the PKK insurgency cannot be ended by mere military operations. Rather than risking the lives of more Turkish soldiers in the mountainous hinterlands the aim is now to roll back the PKK presence in social and political, primarily urban life. The question is, however, at what price? Efforts to contain the Kurdish nationalist movement might ultimately lead to a backlash in Kurdish separatist nationalism and have thus already undermined the Kurdish initiative. This can be read from the many criticisms and outward hostility that the containment approach has already met with from Kurdish social and political actors, as well as from others in Turkey, and which are important in order to assess future prospects for the relationship between the central state and national government and the Kurdish-inhabited southeast region.

¹⁸⁶ "PKK'ya Belçika baskını: Aydar ve Kartal'a gözaltı (Belgium raid on PKK: Aydar and Kartal detained)", *Radikal*, 5 March 2010.

Responses

What have been designated as counterterrorism operations have figured in the Kurdish imagination just as anti-Kurdish operations. Images of handcuffed mayors have become iconic in the Kurdish media, triggering indignation and outrage from DTP/PKK supporters and other Kurdish actors. The closure of the DTP and the arrests of December have quickly been seized on by both the PKK and the DTP/BDP to mobilize the masses and increase support. The current repression is depicted as caused by the AKP government. Supporters of the Kurdish nationalist movement share a deepening sense of hostility towards the ruling party and, with the developments of late, have come to denounce the Kurdish opening (*Kürt açılımı*) as a Kurd-less opening or opening without Kurds (*Kürtsüz açılımı*). Less radical voices, such as the Istanbul Bar Association, merely state their loss of enthusiasm, disappointment and lack of hope now for anything to transpire from the government's initiative.¹⁸⁷

The closure of the DTP in particular deeply dismayed many in the country. Even PM Erdoğan was moved to speak out against it. In Diyarbakır some 10,000 people protested the decision, and deaths among the protestors ensued when a shopkeeper opened fire on the crowd.¹⁸⁸ Meanwhile, at the level of civic associations, collective public statements were made. A total of 91 Diyarbakır civil organizations, including the Chamber of Trade and Commerce, Commodities Exchange and General Practitioner's Association came together for a press conference denouncing the employment of the old oppressive measures and calling for 'justice, equality, law and more freedom'.¹⁸⁹ Joining this call, the Diyarbakır Bar Association, also organized a gathering in the city of representatives from the Bar Associations of half the provinces across the country, which criticized political court rulings that weakened faith in the system, called for a new constitution and, most of all, for an end to violence – with the demand that the PKK be kept out the country.¹⁹⁰

For their part, the PKK and the political party and associations that are associated with it have responded to the government and state attempts to contain their presence in different ways. In response to the AKP, the PKK leadership first pushed forward its own roadmap in an effort to set the conditions for peace and to position itself as a principle actor in the solution process. The physical copy of this has never seen the light of day, after being mysteriously and coincidentally lost in the corridors of power around the time that the AKP launched its Kurdish opening. The next PKK move was to send a group of peace negotiators from northern Iraq to act as go-betweens – the returnees referred to –

¹⁸⁷ "The opening disappoints", *Radikal*, January 17 2010.

¹⁸⁸ "Turkey's Erdogan criticises court decision to ban DTP", December 15, 2009, accessed May 19, 2010. http://www.setimes.com/cocoon/setimes/xhtml/en_GB/features/setimes/newsbriefs/2009/12/15/nb-01

¹⁸⁹ "Diyarbakır, sağduyu istiyor (Diyarbakır wants common sense)", *Radikal*, January 11, 2010.

¹⁹⁰ '40 barodan 'barış' bildirgesi (40 bars subscribe to 'peace')', *Radikal*, January 18, 2010.

presumably with a level of collusion from government agencies, and which for a few days offered high hopes. The PKK roadmap has been neglected since that episode.

In response to the judiciary's operations against its organizational bodies, the PKK leadership in the mountains has continued to call on young people to join the ranks of the guerilla in order to prepare in case of future military operations, and in an attempt to demonstrate to the Turkish state and military that it is still capable of doing so. The PKK has been threatening the possibility of a new war should the movement continue to be contained and rolled back. The PKK has, in the past years, never ceased from recruiting new Kurdish youth into its ranks¹⁹¹, displaying an ongoing distrust towards the Turkish state apparatus and government of the day. The official position maintained by the PKK, namely a unilateral ceasefire with the right to 'self defense' in case the guerilla is under attack, will become more appealing to young Kurds in the light of the crackdown on the legal wing of the movement – all the more so as the idea of self-defense has a twofold significance, both demonstrating a willingness for a peaceful resolution while at the same time insuring the felt need for protection of the Kurdish rights and demands.

Future prospects

Given the deep, established fault lines between the Kurdish movement and the AKP, the future promises ongoing political-ideological struggles that are constitutive also of the ongoing identity-formation of the followers and converts of the two movements. Indeed the latest round has already begun as the two sides give their views of what is required of the new constitution – at the very least something that would prevent another Kurdish party closure by the judiciary, but at the most something that would enshrine Kurdish nationalist rights. This 'battlefield' could remain an ideological and thus non-violent one of political strife and conflict, fought within the legitimate arenas of civil society in a contemporary democracy – including the ultimate sanction of the ballot box. And it still contains potentials for a solution as the AKP grow in confidence regarding its own position *vis-à-vis* the military. Equally, there is plenty of room for radicalization, should the divide between the two sides widen and become increasingly mutually exclusive, especially if the AKP fails to take the lead and embark on the radical route forward that will be necessary to finally bring the PKK down from the mountains and achieve real peace. In this context, one recalls former DTP co-chair Emine Ayna's statement before the 2009 election, that those who vote for the AKP cannot be Kurds.

The ongoing counterterrorism operations of the state, on the other hand, are far more dangerous since they reinforce those voices within the Kurdish nationalist movement that would rather fight their way out of the ongoing repression against their movement, having lost hope for a political solution and believing that a political solution in Turkey can only be found by means of armed struggle. This would mean a rise in armed clashes,

¹⁹¹ Güneş M. Tezcür, "When democratization radicalizes", *Journal of Peace Research*, forthcoming.

possibly leading to a renewed period of warfare between PKK insurgents and the Turkish Armed Forces, and giving rise to increased Turkish and Kurdish nationalism and possible communal violence between Turks and Kurds in the country's largest cities, which host huge numbers of Kurdish migrants and internally displaced people. The danger of the government's initiative becoming a farce – which it already is in the eyes of many Kurds – will only be to the gain of the security forces looking for a modus operandi with which to reassert authority in the country. The AKP has brought this danger on itself insofar as it has sought to embrace the Kurds and the multicultural reality of the country, while disregarding the societal and political presence of the DTP and PKK in the Kurdish regions. In an answer to the realities of the southeast, the AKP has thus far only managed to engage with a number of promises regarding the Kurdish culture and language, and sought to embrace the Kurds through the idea of brotherhood with Turks and equality under Islam. It will need to do much better. Indeed, as Aliza Marcus has argued: 'If Erdogan truly wants a partner for peace, he is likely to find one in the PKK. But if he wants to first destroy the PKK, as his public comments indicate, and then look for Kurds with whom to negotiate, peace will elude him'.¹⁹²

The opposition parties have actively sought to undermine the whole initiative from its very beginnings – in a sense already engaging in very early electoral campaign exercises. Indeed, faced with the upcoming parliamentary elections in 2011 not many significant political changes are to be expected in the coming months. On the contrary, faced with the genuine risk of losing many of its more conservative, Turkish nationalist votes to the MHP or CHP, it seems that the AKP will put the initiative on hold until after the elections. At most it will try to convince the Kurdish voters that it will live-up to its promises following the elections, in order not to lose any more votes to the regional competitor, the BDP. Indeed, moves towards negotiations that are being brought into the open – instead of remaining behind closed doors – could be an exercise by means of which the AKP seeks to demonstrate its 'decisiveness' to solve the issue, genuine or not. The BDP is likely to translate its (DTP) gain in the local elections to a national success emulating that of 2007, or even surpassing it if the prosecutions and arrests of its members and exclusion from the governments' initiative continue. However, should (the instigation of) negotiations continue to fail, it is the PKK that will thrive upon the current developments most of all, as new repressive measures and military operations in the region confirm the PKK's insistence upon maintaining armed struggle – as an insurance for its own survival and the survival of what it perceives as its 'realizations' in the southeast, where an alternative state-building project is already in the making. While this project remains politically unresolved, neither integrated into the national framework (semi-autonomy) nor separated from it (secession), armed struggle may yet be resumed (again).

¹⁹² Marcus, "Troubles in Turkey's backyard".

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“40 barodan 'barış' bildirgesi (40 bars subscribe to ‘peace’).” *Radikal*, January 18, 2010.

Tables

Appendix 3: Resolutions in the Belgian Parliament (Chamber of People's Representatives & Senate), 1989 - 2003

Date	Title	Submitted by	Status
19-09-1989	Proposal for a resolution concerning the Kurds	Hugo Van Dienderen (AGALEV), Jef Sleenckx (SP)	Outdated
14-03-1991	Resolution concerning the problem of the Kurds and other ethnic minorities in Turkey	MPs Hugo Van Rompaey (CVP), Jef Sleenckx (SP) & Hugo Van Dienderen (AGALEV)	Accepted
26-03-1991	Resolution concerning the right to exist of the Kurds in Turkey, Iran, Iraq and the Sovjet-Union	Senator Willy Kuijpers (VU)	Accepted
26-03-1992	Proposal for resolution concerning the protection of the Kurdish People in Turkey	Senator Michiel Maertens (AGALEV)	Without subject
03-03-1993	Resolution concerning the oppression of the Kurds in Turkey	Senator Hugo Van Rompaey (CVP)	Accepted
18-03-1998	Proposal for resolution concerning the Kurdish Question	MP Jacques Lefevre, (PSC Parti Social Chrétien)	Outdated
04-05-1993	Proposal for a resolution concerning the situation in Turkish Kurdistan	Senator Nelly Maes (VU)	Outdated
24-05-1993	Proposal for a resolution concerning the Kurdish problem in Turkey	MPs Hugo Van Dienderen (AGALEV) & Xavier Winkel (ECOLO)	Outdated

20-07-1993	Resolution concerning the advancement of the peace process and the restoration of human rights in the southeast of Turkey	Senator Hugo Van Rompaey (CVP) & Hubert Van Wambeke (CVP)	Accepted
30-01-1995	Proposal for a resolution concerning the penal conviction of Turkish-Kurdish Parliament members in Turkey	Senator Paul Pataer (SP)	Outdated
05-03-1996	Proposal for a resolution concerning the situation of the Kurds in Kurdistan	Senator Anne-Marie Lizin (PS)	Outdated
18-06-1996	Proposal for a resolution concerning the situation of the Kurds in Turkey	MP s Dirk Vandermaelen (SP) & Alfons Borginon (VU)	Outdated
18-03-1998	Proposal for a resolution on the Kurdish question	MP Jacques Lefevre (PSC)	Outdated
19-03-1998	Proposal for a resolution concerning the Kurdish question and the Kurdish refugees	Senator Erika Thijs (CVP)	Outdated
23-06-2000	Resolution concerning the death penalty of the Kurdish PKK-leader Öcalan	MP Ferdy Willems (VU)	Accepted
18-12-2002	Resolution concerning Turkey's accession to the E.U.	MP Ferdy Willems (VU-ID)	Accepted
04-11-2003	Proposal for a resolution concerning Turkey's candidature for member-state of the European Union	MPs Guido Tassenhooye (VB) & Bert Schoofs (VB)	Outdated

Appendix 4: Documented activities by Flemish politicians, 1990 – 2009

June 1990	Jef Sleetckx (SP) and Hugo Van Dienderen (AGALEV) interpellate the Minister of Foreign Affairs Eyskens on the 'intifada' or popular uprising of the Kurds in Turkey and criticize Turkey's decree 413 that allows the oppression popular risings by whatever means.
November 1990	Interpellation of Hugo Van Dienderen (AGALEV) on the hunger strike of 30 Kurds in Brussels who want to draw attention to the plight of the Kurdish refugees in Turkey.
July 1991	Delegation of Willy Kuijpers to Diyarbakir, during which Kuijpers attends the funeral march for the murdered HEP-politician Vedat Aydin that becomes a protest met by heavy repression and violence by the security forces and military present. A young student journalist in the delegation videotapes the incident, and after the tape is smuggled out of the country it is broadcast Belgian national television news.
December 1991- January 1992	Parliamentary delegation to the Kurdish provinces in Turkey, joined by Willy Kuijpers (VU), Jef Sleetckx (SP), Hugo Van Dienderen (AGALEV) & Hugo Van Rompaey (CVP).
September 1992	Press conference concerning the bombing of the Kurdish city Şırnak and the growing number of refugees that are move from the rural Kurdish areas to the cities. Call for humanitarian assistance and the condemnation of Turkey.
February 1993	Jef Sleetckx (SP) and Hugo Van Dienderen (AGALEV) interpellate the Minister of Foreign Affairs Claes about a hunger strike by 720 Kurds in Brussels. Both politicians refer to their personal experience of their visit to the region. They condemn the arms trade of Europe with Turkey and insist on action rather than just words. Claes stresses the initiatives undertaken by the European Community and the importance it attaches to human rights and dialogue.
June 1993	Hearing in the Chamber of People's Representatives of Kurdish representatives of the human rights association IHD.
March 1994	Press conference on the Newroz delegation to Kurdistan, by Senators of AGALEV and Ecolo who call for a total weapon embargo on and tourism boycott of Turkey, and call to use the customs union agreement with Turkey and the OSCE as means to put pressure on the country.
September 1996	Foundation of the 'Coordination Stop the War against the Kurdish People'. A founding text calls upon Belgium to deliver humanitarian assistance to the Kurds suffering in the Middle East and urges the government to press for the respect of human rights, the end of executions, torture and the destruction of villages. The Coordination calls for a political instead of military solution, an end to the arms trade with the countries in the region and the development of diplomatic initiatives in order to establish a ceasefire and start negotiations. The call is signed by Willy Kuijpers (VU), Hugo Van Dienderen (AGALEV), Jef

	<p>Sleeckx (SP), Hugo Van Rompaey (CD&V), Anny De Magt (VLD), who constitute the Protection Committee of the initiative. 150 civil society organizations subscribe to the call. At the same time, a press conference is held to criticize raids by the Belgian police and gendarmerie on the Kurdish satellite TV station in Denderleeuw and the Kurdish Parliament in Exile. The press conference argues that Turkey is putting European governments under pressure to silence the Kurds.</p>
June 1996	<p>Hugo Van Dienderen (AGALEV) interpellates the Minister of Interior Affairs Vandelanotte concerning the hunger strike in Leuven, in solidarity with the prisoners in the Turkish prisons. He demands what kind of initiatives Belgium is planning to take. The Minister replies that human rights are always object of discussion in the contacts with Turkey.</p>
November 1996	<p>Hugo Van Dienderen (AGALEV) interpellates the Minister of Justice De Clerck concerning the raids ('Operation Spoetnik') on the Kurdistan Committee, the Kurdish Parliament in Exile and the Kurdish satellite TV station, and the accusations of money laundering, arms trade, drug traffic, human trafficking and extortion. The raid on the TV station is considered a violation of the freedom of press, and the cooperation with the Turkish authorities is condemned. The Minister denies any cooperation with Turkey.</p>
March 1997	<p>Colloquium by the Kurdish institute on 'Human Rights in Turkey and the Kurdish Issue', in the European Parliament (hosted by the EFA). Opened by Bart Staes, at that time assistant to Jacques Vandemeulebroucke in the EP. Present are a member of IHD, former mayor of Diyarbakır Mehdi Zana and Nizamettin Toğuç of the Kurdish Parliament in Exile.</p>
Spring 1998	<p>Hunger strikes in Hasselt by Kurdish asylum seekers facing expulsion. Hugo Van Rompaey (CVP) joins the strikers and Jef Sleeckx (SP) threatens to block all decisions in parliament in need of a majority vote if the Minister of Interior Vandelanotte does not answer the calls of the strikers. The strikers are ultimately allowed to stay in Belgium temporarily, based upon the reports of International Human Rights Organizations (so it is declared by the minister).</p>
March 1998	<p>Newroz delegation to Diyarbakır joined by Jan Loones (VU).</p>
March 1998	<p>Interpellation by Alfons Borginon (VU-ID) of the Minister of Foreign Affairs Derycke concerning 'the Kurdish problem'. The Minister answers that the European authorities condemn the terrorism of the PKK and consider it a terrorist organization.</p>
October 1998	<p>Conference, 'The Kurds, a people without a state', organized by the Kurdish Institute Brussels and the Coordination 'Stop the War against the Kurdish people' (in cooperation with Vrede VZW, Kon-Kurd and NCOS). Present are Mahmut Sakar (HADEP-member), Mehdi Zana Eren Keskin (Human Rights lawyer and activist) and also Danielle Mitterand (wife of the then French president). Speakers include Alfons Borginon (VU) and Geert Versnick (VLD). Turkish newspapers report 'Separatist conference'.</p>

November 1998	The Coordination writes a letter to the Italian Ministers demanding a special status for PKK leader Abdullah Öcalan (who is seeking political asylum in Europe at that time). Signatures are gathered from Belgian politicians.
January 1999	In the light of incidents between Turkish and Kurdish protestors in Belgium, Alfons Borginon (VU) interpellates the Minister of Foreign Affairs to ask why Belgium has not taken any initiative in order to give political asylum to Öcalan. Lode Vanoost (AGALEV) completes with a demand to increase the initiatives for Turkey's democratization and the request to make cooperation conditional upon this. Minister Dereycke answers that national security in Belgium is his main concern and the PKK is considered a terrorist organization, close to defeat.
March 1999	<p>The Coordination interpellates the Minister of Interior Affairs in the Belgian Chamber of People's Representatives over taking off the air the Kurdish satellite TV station MED (Denderleeuw).</p> <p>Lode Vanoost interpellates the Minister of Foreign Affairs on the 'Affaire Öcalan', reading a letter of the Coordination published in one of the mainstream newspapers, which criticizes the fact that there cannot be negotiations with the PKK as it is considered a 'terrorist organization'. References are made to the cases of Kosovo's UCK and the Palestinian PLO once considered terrorist organizations, but later peace makers. An end to the cooperation with Turkey is demanded. Minister Dereycke replies that the Kurdish question and the PKK need to be distinguished. As Öcalan is captured, a solution to the PKK fighting will be near.</p>
December 1999	Conference, 'Language, literature and culture of the Kurdish People', in the European Parliament. Organized by KIB and the Kurdish Pen Association. Present are the Flemish minister of culture, Bert Anciaux (SPIRIT) and Ferdy Willems (SPIRIT).
May 1999	Hugo Van Rompaey (CVP), member of the Iveka Intercommunal arranges for the Turkish national television chain TRT to be removed from the cable television provider in the province of Antwerp, charging Turkey with disrespect of the Human Rights.
April 2000	Study day 'City Bonds and solidarity', on the relationship between Kurdish city Derik (under HADEP mayorship) and Belgian municipalities Herent (under Willy Kuijpers, VU mayor) and Geel (under Hugo Van Rompaey, CVP mayor).
May 2000	Ferdy Willems (VU) interpellates on the arrests of HADEP mayors.
March 2001	Newroz Delegation to Diyarbakir joined by Vincent Van Quickenborne (VU-ID).
Spring 2002	Vincent Van Quickenborne (VU-ID) interpellates Minister Annemie Neyts (VLD) on the designation of the PKK as a terrorist organization. Leen Laenens (AGALEV) and Ferdy Willems (VU-ID) interpellate the Minister in the Belgian Senate over the same issue.

March 2002	Newroz Delegation to Diyarbakir joined by Jan Beghin (CVP).
December 2002	Conference, 'The EU, Turkey and the Kurds', in the Congress Hall of the Belgian Chamber of People's Representatives. Organized by the Kurdish Institute of Brussels, Vrede VZW, Rodenbachfonds and the faction of the People's Union (VU) in parliament. Present are IHD lawyer Akin Birdal, Ferdy Willems (VU), Anne Van Lancker (SP), Nelly Maes (VU). A delegation is organized that same month to Iraqi Kurdistan, joined by Vincent Van Quickenborne (VU), Jan Beghin (CVP) and Ferdy Willems (VU), during which the delegation members make a visit to a PKK guerillas camp in the Kandil mountains (north Iraq / Iraqi Kurdistan). A meeting is held with Osman Öcalan, brother of Abdullah Öcalan. In an interview made there for the Kurdish satellite TV station, ROJTV, Beghin says that the PKK can never be a partner for dialogue itself, given that it is not a political party but an army. He emphasizes the need to safeguard the Kurdish language, as 'language is the people'.
November 2004	Conference, 'Turkey and the European Union: the Kurdish question', by the KIB, the Coordination and Kurdish National Congress (KNK) in the Congress Hall of the Belgian Senate, hosted by Lionel Vandenberghe, senator for SPIRIT (successor to VU) Jan Beghin (SPA) and Bart Staes (AGALEV) are speakers.
March 2004	Newroz delegation (no politicians attending).
April 2004	Conference in the European Parliament, 'The accession process of Turkey to the European Union and the Kurdish question'. Hosted by Nelly Maes, MEP for SPIRIT in EFA. Jan Beghin, Hugo Van Rompaey on the panel. Vice-president of DEHAP, Nazmi Gür, present as well as KNK member, Adem Uzun. Van Rompaey and Maes criticize listing of Kongra-Gel (successor to the PKK) as a terrorist organization. Kurdish newspapers print, 'Belgian politicians consider EU decision hypocritical'. The accession of Turkey is considered too early, as the Copenhagen criteria would not be fulfilled. EFA demands that Turkey lower the 10% election threshold, to allow Kurdish representation in parliament. Many Belgian Ministers and Flemish politicians are present at the conference as the decision about the start of the accession negotiations with Turkey is still pending at that time.
April 2005	Press conference by Hugo Van Rompaey (CVP) and Jan Beghin (SPA) in support of the hunger strike by Turkish Kurds in the Miniemenkerk (church) in Brussels.
November 2005	Press conference, 'The beginning of forgetting the Kurds', by the European Turkish Civic Commission (EUTCC) and the Coordination. Present are Selahattin Demirtas (IHD) and Nazmi Gür (EUTCC), as well as Jan Beghin (EUTCC) and Kris Van Dijck (N-VA, successor to VU).
March 2005	Hugo Van Rompaey (CVP) speaks at the International Pen Association's conference in Diyarbakir on the cultural rights of the Kurds.

March 2006	<p>Press conference in the House of Parliamentarians, 'What is the state of democratization in Turkey?', in remembrance of the 35th anniversary of the 1971 military coup, by the KIB, the Assembly of Democratic Armenians in Belgium and Info-Turk. Present are Jan Beghin and Adelheid Byttebier (AGALEV), Kris Van Dijck (N-VA), Pierre Galant (PS), Sven Gatz (VLD, but former VU-member), Nelly Maes (SPIRIT) & Hugo Van Rompaey (CVP).</p>
April 2006	Lionel Vandenberghe (SPIRIT) joins the delegation of the Belgian Senate's Commission on Foreign Affairs to Turkey in order to discuss the Kurdish question in the light of the Turkey-EU accession negotiations.
April 2007	Visit of Mayor Demirbas to Mayors Kuijpers, Minnebo (Groen!), Frans Peeters (CVP).
April 2007	Interpellations in the Senate by Geert Lambert (Spirit) and Josy Dubié (Ecolo) concerning violent incidents between Turkish nationalists and Kurds in the heart of Brussels, and the Turkish Army's cross border attacks in Northern Iraq / Iraqi Kurdistan (in order to demolish the PKK bases).
March 2007	Interpellation in the Senate by Lionel Vandenberghe (SPIRIT) concerning the health condition of Abdullah Öcalan. Pledges to the Committee for Prevention of Torture of the Council of Europe to send a medical team in order to do a health-check.
April 2008	Kurdish writers invited by Flemish Minister of Culture, Bert Anciaux (SPIRIT, former VU).
October 2008	Conference, 'The Accession process EU-Turkey: state of the art', in the House of Parliamentarians, hosted by Geert Lambert (SPIRIT) with the Inter-parliamentary Working Group, the Kurds (former Coordination) with KIB, KNK and vzw Vrede. Present are Bart Staes (Groen!), Lionel Vandenberghe (SPIRIT), Frieda Brépoels (N-VA), Dirk Van der Maelen (SP.a), Hilde Vautmans (VLD) and Elke Tindemans (CD&V).
April 2009	Press conference, 'Peace for dialogue: peace for Abdullah Öcalan, peace in Kurdistan', by KIB, the Inter-parliamentary Working Group, the Kurds. Present is Piet De Bruyn (N-VA).

Appendix 5: Resolutions and exemplary initiatives by Flemish politicians in the European Parliament, period 1984 – 1988

October 1984	Motion for a resolution tabled by Staes on the fourth anniversary of the coming to power of the military regime in Turkey and events there condoned or instigated by the Turkish Government.
April 1985	Motion for a resolution tabled by Jef Ulburghs on the alarming situation of Kurdish prisoners in Turkey,
March 1985	Proposal for a resolution by Willy Kuijpers and Jacques Vandemeulebroecke, concerning the fate of the Kurdish minority in Turkey.
May 1985	Proposal for a resolution by Willy Kuijpers and Jacques Vandemeulebroecke concerning the situation of the Kurds in the Middle East, demanding the Ministers of Foreign Affairs, the European Commission and the Council of Ministers to set up political cooperation with the countries where the Kurds live, in order to defend their rights to education and culture.
January 1987	Proposal for a resolution by Willy Kuijpers and Jacques Vandemeulebroucke, criticizing the possible interference of Turkey in Kirkuk and Mosul (Northern Iraq / Iraqi Kurdistan).
April 1987	Proposal for a resolution by Jef Ulburghs, Willy Kuijpers and others concerning the deportation of 1000 villagers from North-West Kurdistan (i.e. Turkish Kurdistan).
December 1987	Intervention by Willy Kuijpers over people's right of existence in Kurdistan and Eritrea.
July 1988	Press conference in EP by Willy Kuijpers, VU (EFA) MEP on the support of the EFA for the liberation struggles in Kurdistan and Eritrea, in which Kuijpers calls upon Europe to take responsibility regarding these areas.
April 1988	Proposal for a resolution and parliamentary debate on the use of chemical weapons in the Iran-Iraq War on the basis of seven motions for a resolution, including motions by Willy Kuijpers (VU), Jacques Vandemeulebroucke (VU) and Jef Ulburghs (SP). Proposal demands parliamentary investigation into the genocide in Iraq, protection for the Kurdish inhabitants, annulment of Iraq's UN membership and humanitarian assistance. Resolution accepted by the plenary.

Appendix 6: Family tree of the successive Flemish nationalist parties that originated from the People's Union Party or *Volksunie*

